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JEANNE DE VAUDREUIL;

OR,

Reconciliation.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

"E certo è mio padre bavoso il cuore sì, certo, che non mi pareva
che fusse il mio

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I OFFER this translation of " Jeanne de Vaudreuil " to the English public, well knowing that it falls far short of the beauty and elegance of the original, yet with some degree of confidence, since it is published with the sanction, and at the expressed desire of the Author's family, to one of whom I am greatly indebted for the revisal and correction of the manuscript.

THE TRANSLATOR.

November 1855.

JEANNE DE VAUDREUIL;

OR,

RECONCILIATION.

Book the First.

CHAPTER I.

I AM young, and my memory is not yet overburdened. The interest I feel in the few past years (few, indeed, yet well filled) alone induces me to take up my pen, and causes me a sweet, though sorrowful pleasure, while I retrace the events of years that are no more. They have flown rapidly; but they have left their impress on my life. I think over them with gratitude. Have they not fitted me for happiness? and have not their lessons taught me to regard all things with that feeling of confidence which enables us to bear the evil, and enjoy the happy days of our lives?

After a long absence, here I am once more at Vieilcastel. The turreted towers, the view from my window, stretching to the snowy peaks of the Pyrenees, the park which sur-

rounds the castle, every path, every tree, recalls to my mind some circumstance connected with my early youth, and the friends whom I so tenderly loved. There are beings, the mere sight of whom does us good, whose earnest glances make us feel grave, and turn our thoughts heavenwards ; and who, when gone, bequeath to us an undying standard of nobleness and dignity, which guides us through life. By cherishing the things above, may we not learn to judge of those below ?

I was left an orphan at an age when the loss of my parents affected me but little. My father, on his death-bed, confided me to the guardianship of his best friend, M. de Lussac. He was a kind old man, but a slave to propriety, polite but stiff, benevolent but cold, and with as much wit as a man can have who does not know how to smile. He could discern good from evil—practised the former and avoided the latter ; but of ridicule, of lively or pointed wit, he had no perception ; he would have measured them by rule and compass, and they merely excited his indignation. He placed me in a convent, where my education was carried on, as education generally is, with much trouble and little result. My mental powers, stupefied by the uniformity of my existence, lay dormant, unconscious of the possibility of awakening. I had no idea of the narrow limits of my horizon. In this not unnatural state of ignorance, I reached the age of fifteen.

About this time, I was invited to spend part of my holidays at the house of Madame de Chambrie. She was a relation of my guardian, and had always shewn me great kindness. Her chateau was not very far from Paris, in a delightful situation, and for one who, like myself, knew

little of nature's beauties, the smiling rural scenery was fraught with peculiar charms. I rambled all day long in the park with Madame de Chambrie's daughters. Sometimes their brother Gaston accompanied us. He was a very pleasing young man, though rather grave for his age. His intellectual and moral life had begun early. Although I did not always comprehend him, I felt that his feelings and his thoughts were of an order that would interest me deeply, could I but attain to it. Gaston, in my mind, was invested with all the interest of mystery.

One morning, when we were walking in the park, Gaston, turning to one of his companions, said, "Maurice, did you see my cousin de Vaudreuil before you left the Pyrenees?"

"I did, and I think you will see him here before long. He intended to leave Vieilcastel a few days after my departure from Ermont."

"He will have been very little at home this year."

"And it will be long before he returns," said Maurice; "he intends to make a long journey, for scientific purposes, as he says."

"Does his wife accompany him?"

"No, she is to remain at Vieilcastel with her child; I believe she will spend the winter there."

"Indeed! how will she bear her husband's long absence?"

"I do not know. She looked extremely unhappy the last time I saw her."

"Poor woman!" cried Gaston; "she has suffered much. I wonder when I look at her that her mind is equal to the strength of her feelings. And yet, although her heart is

filled with strong passions, what exquisite moderation in her whole bearing, what perfect composure in her manners and language !”

“ Who is it speaks of ‘strong passions ?’ ” asked a voice which made me start.

I turned, and saw M. de Beaugency approaching us. He was a man about forty years of age. I had often remarked him, and in his presence, I hardly know why, I never felt quite at ease. He was kind to every one, but there was a shade of irony in his kindest words. He seemed to hold all mankind, including himself, in great contempt ; but his contempt was without bitterness. Admiration formed no part of his nature, and he felt perfectly satisfied with the melancholy result of his own reflections ; indifference had become his second nature, and spared him all painful emotion. Although he set little value on the good qualities of others, and expected little from them, still he could discern them readily, and appreciate them as he would whatever else was pleasing to the eye.

“ Who is it speaks of ‘strong passions ?’ ” repeated M. de Beaugency, as he joined us.

“ It is I,” replied Gaston. “ I say that Madame de Vaudreuil has a heart of fire.”

“ True, it is her only fault.”

“ And is it one ?”

“ Certainly. It is weak and ridiculous ; especially in a woman of her understanding and attainments.”

“ I cannot think so,” replied Gaston. “ On the contrary, it seems to me that to love passionately is one of the noblest aims of life.”

"Have you ever tried?" asked M. de Beaugency, with a supercilious look.

"No, but I shall do so."

"Well! when you recover from your first love, you shall tell me your experience. Passionate feelings, my good friend, would be a very fine thing if they did but last; but as they must come to an end, it is not worth while to bear the torment they bring with them. Do you imagine that Madame de Vaudreuil is very happy? And do you think it can be very pleasant for her husband to have so passionately loved a woman with whom he has now so little in common? Far better had they been content with a reasonable friendship, and the mutual attention which good breeding requires. Had they been so, they would not now be continually hurting each other's feelings, and making each other suffer cruelly."

"They still love one another," said Maurice; "and if M. de Vaudreuil appears unhappy, it is because a mind so eager in the pursuit of truth cannot endure to live in scepticism."

"That is another folly," observed M. de Beaugency.

Two days after this conversation, the Marquis de Vaudreuil arrived at Chambrie. The few words I had heard relative to him had made me curious to see him. I watched him attentively. He was about twenty-eight years of age; tall, and of a noble, dignified countenance. A refined, almost a sardonic smile, played on his lips, quite at variance with the expression of his flashing eye. There was something so sincere, so frank, and so disinterested in his countenance, that I felt prepossessed in his favour. He was a man of polished and attractive man-

ners, even though, at times, certain unguarded expressions would escape him, shewing that he was not always master of himself. He appeared sad, and not inclined to converse ; only now and then, when the subject interested him, would he take part in the conversation. He then launched into it with astonishing eagerness, and dazzled us by the richness and variety of his views, as if the subject on which he spoke were the only one interesting to him. There are men whose twofold nature enables them to play a double part, and whose brilliant intellect often serves only to conceal their deep emotions.

The only person with whom M. de Vaudreuil seemed to take pleasure in conversing was Maurice d'Ermont. This young man, whose character was weak, and who possessed but little originality of mind, allowed himself to be entirely guided by the Marquis, not knowing whither the latter might lead him. He loved M. de Vaudreuil, admired him, and listened with pleasure while the Marquis spoke to him without reserve of his feelings, which he did, evidently because Maurice could not quite understand him. He found in Maurice sympathy, without great penetration. This was just what he needed. Ignorance and weakness have their part to play in the world ; and, were it only to embolden stronger minds that shrink from observation, who would dare to proscribe them ?

One evening, when, after a long walk, we were all fatigued, and the conversation flagged, a young lady, merely to break the silence, asked M. de Vaudreuil if he were not shortly returning to Vieilcastel.

"No," he replied, in a very impatient manner, "I cannot endure that place ;" and, rising abruptly, he left the

young lady not a little surprised at the irritability she had so unwittingly provoked.

I was sitting at the other end of the room, with a few young people of the party. M. de Vaudreuil joined us. He remained silent for a few minutes, then making an effort to rouse himself, he took up the different books that lay upon the table, one after the other, running over their titles.

"Would you like me to read to you?" he said, opening a volume of poems.

We accepted his offer gratefully. The Marquis turned over the leaves, and read several pieces which he selected. His voice was sonorous, and he read extremely well. His earnest tone made the words of the poet penetrate to the soul. We saw that certain lines made a deep impression upon him. They either recalled some remembrance of the past, or stirred some present feeling, causing the most sensitive and painful chords of his heart to vibrate. Regret, altered love, joys that were no more, and, above all, the unhappiness of man on earth, his doubts, his ignorance, all affected him individually, and it was no longer a mere book he was reading. His voice faltered and trembled. At last he threw down the volume, and covering his face with his hands, he abandoned himself without reserve to the feelings which agitated him.

A long silence followed, and when M. de Vaudreuil raised his head and spoke again, a fresh listener had approached from behind, and stood in the shade, regarding him with the eye of an observer, rather than of a friend. I was the only one of the group aware of M. de Beaugency's presence.

“How beautiful this poetry is!” exclaimed M. de Vaudreuil, trying to read our thoughts; “how it speaks to the soul! how touching it is! How it transports you into the feelings of others! It is at all times pleasing for the mind to make a discovery, whatever may be the nature of that discovery, and, as yet, your minds alone are interested by these descriptions. Far different is the case of one who has already felt every emotion, and known each suffering. The soul of such an one can no longer breathe the air of poesy, and spread her wings before it. Alas no! she folds them irresistibly, searches each recess, probes each wound; and every line of the poet, every word which enchants you, my friends, makes her retrace the past, or cast some fearful glance into the future. The poet speaks of joy, and the heart murmurs, ‘For me there is no more.’ The poet sings of love, and the heart cries, ‘Love! but I have abused it, profaned it; I am no more worthy of it; no more worthy to be loved, no more worthy of loving.’ The poet makes the name of truth resound, and a cry of agony escapes from the over-burdened breast; and the eye seeks in vain, meeting nothing but empty space. At last the poet sings of suffering; and this time imagination, which, in the days of youth, had seized upon this melancholy word with rapture, adorning and clothing it with beauty, and choosing it as the subject of its dreams, now keeps a sad and fearful silence; but the heart responds, and reckons one by one the many sufferings which have laid it waste. With the ideal suffering presented by the poet, the heart contrasts real suffering; and each thought which enchants you, and now leads you captive, comes burning into the soul of the man who has suffered.”

"Are you quite sure," demanded Gaston, "that even in youth we must look beyond the precincts of our own hearts, in order to understand sorrow? Does not grief lie concealed within every breast, even before circumstances may call it to the surface?"

"Certainly," replied the Marquis; "if we were incapable of suffering, we could not conceive any idea of suffering; but before we have experienced it, it is enveloped in poetry. A gilded cloud hides its harsh outlines from our eyes. Later in life the veil is raised, and poetry, with all its enchantments, does not prevent our seeing what lies beneath."

"Ah!" said Gaston, "we should do more than poesy can do—not hide or disguise sorrow, but soften its sharp edge, and overwhelm it with happiness."

"But where is this happiness to be found?" said M. de Vaudreuil. "In a heart devastated by tempests, in beings who do not comprehend us, in the Divinity which hides itself from us? Is it in the beauties of nature, at times mournful, but always full of harmony and grandeur? Oh! beware how you seek after happiness!"

"Really," said Maurice, who was easily influenced by what he heard around him, "if all the hopes of youth are to end in disenchantment, I would rather begin with it."

As he spoke, Maurice looked so candid and honest, that M. de Vaudreuil was greatly amused. A sarcastic, but not an ill-natured smile, played on his lips. "My dear friend," said he, "experience makes men sad; but it is impossible to discuss or dissect sorrow, as you seem to wish to do, and as others have ridiculously tried to do. Nothing dis-

pleases me so much as the multitude of undefined sorrows, and woes ill understood, that are talked of in these days. True suffering is a deep and solemn feeling. Do not trifle with it. You have something else to do in the world."

"Well!" said Maurice, "you know the way; do you guide us."

"Whither should I guide you?" replied the Marquis, eagerly. "What would you have me teach you? To pull down?—There is no need to teach this. To build up again? I know not how myself, and cannot teach others. I believe little, very little in the power of reason; she has done but little for me. Has she led me to truth? has she even shewn me the road to truth? She has not even provided me with arms against myself—against the least of my regrets."

M. de Vaudreuil spoke with strange bitterness. The words escaped from his lips rapidly and carelessly. What could it matter if he betrayed himself; who could understand him?

"What an enthusiast!" murmured M. de Beaugency; and taking the arm of the Marquis, "come with me, my dear Vaudreuil," said he; "how can these children understand you?"

The Marquis turned quickly; he was not pleased to have been overheard by M. de Beaugency; and like a guilty man caught in the very act, he allowed himself to be led away by his friend.

I had never been so much affected by any conversation. Those words of sorrow, love, regret, to which, until now, I had attached no definite meaning, began to trouble me.

Without comprehending them, I saw their effects on this man ; and a confused foreboding that they might also have a place in my life, filled me with fear. To divert my thoughts, I glided from the room, and hastened into the park.

The moon shone brightly ; it was almost as light as day, and the heavens' deep azure was unclouded. A silver hue was shed on all around me, broken only by the flickering shadow of the tall poplars which waved in the breeze. I fancied I could distinguish voices near me, and for a moment I felt afraid ; but was soon reassured by the sight of the Marquis and M. de Beaugency on a seat not far off. I stopped involuntarily at the bend of the path, and heard these words, in M. de Beaugency's *nonchalant, spirituel* voice :—

"You are unreasonable, my dear friend. Go, or remain, it matters little ; but do try to restore order to your mind. This longing for truth is a terrible malady. Every other may be satisfied, but this can never meet its object ; and the only hope of cure lies in the chance that it will wear itself out in its fruitless endeavours."

"And is it by such means that you have been cured?" said M. de Vaudreuil, in a most sarcastic tone. "I can scarcely persuade myself that one of your cold character has ever been disturbed by doubts."

"I did my best to accommodate myself to reality."

"And you have succeeded wonderfully ! Your mind and reality are made for one another. Happy union !"

M. de Beaugency did not reply. He stirred up the gravel of the walk with his stick, and although his words

were calm and dry, you would have said he was not so indifferent as he wished to appear.

"Doubt," resumed M. de Vaudreuil, after a pause, "has deprived me of my faith, of my God, and has troubled my happiness ; and what has it given me in return ? Have I even faith in reason ? On the contrary, I am convinced it is not to the mind alone that truth addresses herself, but to the whole being. Truth is not merely an abstract idea to be conceived by the intellect, but above all a living principle, harmonious and fruitful in its results ; and while we despair of attaining to it, our hearts must be ever restless."

"The difference of our age," said M. de Beaugency, "accounts much for the difference of our views. Hereafter, with a more lowly aim, you will reach some goal. You are at that critical period of life when, the edifice of illusions having crumbled away, you think that all is lost. Some time must elapse before you can allow that life is bearable. But, in your place, even now, I think," he added, with an interrogatory smile, "that instead of making my happiness, as you do, depend upon its greater or less conformity to an ever varying standard, I would return to Vieilcastel——"

"Do not speak of that," said the Marquis, rising, and turning towards the chateau ; "I am resolved to depart. You comprehend only the exterior of my life."

I remained alone. The words of the two friends still sounded in my ears. They seemed to warn me of some unknown, some mysterious danger. Nature all around me was calm and beautiful. Before me were the hills clothed with forests, and the fertile valley beneath. Some

higher points, lighted up by the moon, rose in the distance, and were lost in transparent vapour. A feeling of security crept into my heart, whilst I contemplated nature so serene, forming a soothing contrast with the words I had just heard. I had a confused idea of something above all the miseries of life, of an invisible Being who presides over human destinies.

I have never forgotten that evening.

CHAPTER II.

A SHORT time after the arrival of M. de Vaudreuil at Chambrie, my guardian left us for Vieilcastel, to stay with his niece, the Marchioness, during the time of her husband's intended absence. I did not see M. de Lussac again for a very long time.

He had been away nearly two years and a half, when he returned, in order to take me back with him to the Pyrenees.

As soon as I was in the carriage, the rapid pace of the horses, the convent walls behind me, the turreted castle in my mind's perspective, the present so animated, the future so golden, all conspired to transport me with joy ; I quite bewildered M. de Lussac. He contemplated me with a degree of fear, as he would have done some strange phenomenon. His countenance, generally so grave and kind, expressing only compassion for the sorrows of others, and a desire to alleviate them, formed a strong contrast to my untutored spirits. He could not understand my effusions of happiness, and, as it often happens to elderly people who have forgotten their youth, his astonishment seemed to reproach me. I saw, indeed, my guardian's white hair, his bent figure, and wrinkled brow ; but it never

occurred to me that his impressions must be different from my own.

The first sight of the Pyrenees caused me a thrill of delight. When I beheld the long chain stretching far in the horizon, the snowy peaks of dazzling whiteness, separated by verdant valleys, and the whole mellowed by distance, I felt that until I entered into more intimate communion with Nature, something must be wanting to my life. For, indeed, life is not complete until every feeling and every faculty have found nourishment and employment.

Now, when I approach Vieilcastel, and my eyes rest on the mountains, my impressions are not the same. I feel subdued rather than elated. Instead of uttering cries of joy, my eyes are suffused with tears. The beautiful surprises me less, but touches me more ; and associations connected with my favourite mountains speak to my heart, while Nature speaks to my soul.

We arrived at the castle too late to see Madame de Vaudreuil that night. I was enchanted on entering the small gothic room prepared for me. I thought myself some lady of ancient times, and dreamt of knights and troubadours. The bright rays of the sun penetrating into the room awoke me early the next morning. I hastened to the window, and remained for some minutes rapt in admiration. Majestic trees rose before me, and beyond the valley, the Pyrenees. It was one of those lovely mornings which usually precede days of intense heat. Scarcely a breeze fanned the leaves ; the hum of insects playing in the air, the warbling of birds, the rushing of the torrent, with the thousand nameless sounds which usher in a beautiful day, formed a charm-

ing concert, and awoke the mind to life and feeling. I hastened to descend into the park. I passed from one shady walk to another ; sometimes running with childish glee, sometimes resting to breathe more freely the pure, fresh air of morning.

I was thus rapturously enjoying Nature, and yielding to the emotions which her glories excited within me, when the opening of a window attracted my attention. I was near the most ancient wing of the castle. In many places, creeping plants had attached themselves firmly to the building, hiding with their thick foliage the defects in the wall, from which more than one stone had crumbled away.

A woman, young, and very beautiful, leant upon the window sill. I was so situated that I could see her without being observed myself. She had evidently just risen, and was wrapped in a white dressing-gown ; her hair hanging in disorder round her neck. Her features were of faultless regularity, and her whole person bore that stamp of refinement and distinction which charms so instantaneously. I wish I could represent her as I saw her then ; but nothing is so difficult to describe as depth of expression, always sad, always melancholy, yet ever varying. Interest, admiration, peace, joy almost, seemed to pass over her thoughtful brow. She bore in her eyes traces of subdued passion, which contrasted strongly with the extreme frailty of her appearance ; her baffled strength had taken refuge in her heart. Although her whole being wore the impress of mental suffering, she appeared calm, as one may become who seeks not to escape from sorrow, but accepts it deliberately to its full extent.

She held a letter, or rather a note, in her hand, which she read over many times, as if endeavouring to penetrate its meaning. Did she seek what was not there? was she pained at what she found? She remained long at the window, and I could not turn my eyes away. She glanced over the surrounding country, and appeared for a moment to enjoy the beauties of nature, but was quickly again absorbed in thought—painful certainly, for her eyes became dim with tears—and I saw her turn away.

Soon afterwards, when I was returning to the chateau, a little boy of about six or seven years of age, who was playing on the terrace, ran down the steps, and without ceremony threw himself into my arms. There was so much grace and artlessness in the manners of this child—such a pretty mixture of affection and gaiety, that I felt immediately drawn towards him. Notwithstanding the difference in our age, this light-hearted freedom, these sudden transports of joy and indefinite hope, were common to us both.

“You do not know my mamma,” he said to me; “I will take you to her;” and smiling with a mysterious air, and delighted, as one who can promise much, because he has much to give, he took me by the hand, and not minding my resistance, dragged me quickly through passages and staircases, and introduced me abruptly into Madame de Vaudreuil’s apartment.

The half-darkness of the room increased my confusion. I was for a moment unable to distinguish any thing. At last, I perceived the charming woman whom I had seen from the garden. She was reclining rather than seated on a couch. Her sweet and melodious voice encouraged

me to approach her. She rose to receive me, and looking at me with a friendly yet searching glance, she bade me welcome with a most enchanting smile. It seemed to me that she had read through my whole soul ; and so thinking my words could teach her no more, I felt my shyness vanish.

"I fear," said the Marchioness, "that you will find life at Vieilcastel rather monotonous."

"Oh ! madame, I am not afraid of that. I have already formed a friendship with your trees and meadows ; and, besides, it is so easy to be happy."

"Do you really think so ?" said she. "Well, perhaps you are right. There is a time in life when one is clever enough to gather the roses, and avoid the thorns."

"I do not know about that, madame. But as to roses and thorns, there were only poppies at my convent."

"That is still better, my child. There is not a more peaceful time than that when sorrows and joys are equally in perspective. Distance, which lessens the first, gives a brighter colour to the latter."

"How is that, madame ?"

"It acts in two ways," she replied. "Our sorrows appear less manifold, our joys less divided. It is not sorrow in the aggregate that causes us to suffer, but its several pangs. Neither is one cause of rejoicing sufficient to make us happy ; we need them all, and need them every moment of our lives."

I had leant forward to look at a miniature which was on the table, in which I at once recognised M. de Vaudreuil. He appeared younger in this portrait than when I had seen him ; and the expression of countenance, though

lively and full of feeling, yet spoke of more peace and confidence.

"Do you think it a good likeness?" I asked of the Marchioness.

"It was," she replied.

A slight colour came to her cheek as she said this. She rose to shew me some pictures; then, turning to M. de Lussac, who had just entered the room—

"Uncle," said she, "I have a letter from Victor."

"Ah! I am glad to hear it, you have been expecting one so long."

"Yes, I longed to receive one, and yet——"

M. de Lussac looked at the Marchioness with astonishment. The earnest feelings of his niece were as incomprehensible to him as my thoughtless gaiety.

"This letter is very sorrowful," she resumed. "It grieves me to the heart."

"Does he speak of his return?"

"No."

As she turned away her head, I was struck by her emotion. For the first time, I had an insight into the workings of the heart.

Since then, I have seen more of life. I have become better acquainted with its sorrows, I have tasted its best joys, and have learnt some of its most beautiful lessons. I have loved its fruits, after its flowers. No, I cannot regret my youth; and yet, when I think of it, a sigh escapes my breast. That freshness of impression, that artless wonder, those unpremeditated aspirations, will never return; and my second youth, as it takes flight towards the

future, carries with it a heavy weight of painful recollections, and joys that are no more.

I soon became much attached to Madame de Vaudreuil—she was so kindly indulgent to me, and seemed to take such pleasure in my youth and lightness of heart. My inexperience made her smile ; and the disposition of her mind, which had remained active and vigorous amidst all her sorrow, often led her to rally me upon the contradictions of my character, and to ridicule my romantic ideas. I feared her pleasantries less than her more serious moments, because I understood them more easily. A sort of embarrassment possessed me when she was cast down, and when, without speaking of her grief, her whole conversation bore a tinge of sorrow, which wrung my heart. I have never seen united, as in her, so much strength and weakness. She possessed a sort of heroism which made her triumph over her most melancholy impressions. After days of deep dejection, she would recover sufficient energy to occupy herself with indifferent subjects. Sometimes the effort was visible. Her silence, and her constraint, shewed that, with all her exertion, she was only just able to restrain her emotion. But, at other times, with a charming elasticity, she would give vent to that vivacity which was so natural to her.

I soon discovered that the absence of M. de Vaudreuil was a subject of grief to the Marchioness ; still, it seemed to me, that regret at being separated for some time from a beloved object, could not cause such deep sorrow. She never spoke of her husband ; but when, accidentally, the name of the Marquis was mentioned, she became troubled, as if she feared we might read the sentiments which this

name awoke in her heart. She only liked to speak of him to Roger. Often she would take her son on her knees, and for hours together would tell him little stories in which M. de Vaudreuil played the principal part. The child listened to her with delight ; and his father, whose recollection had faded a little from his memory during the last two years, became to him an object of enthusiasm and admiration. With no ordinary tact, he knew how to avoid anything that might wound the Marchioness. I do not know how far he had seen or guessed at her sorrow, but he shewed a wonderful power of discrimination in speaking of his father.

One morning, in my wanderings, I perceived Madame de Vaudreuil sitting on a bank that commanded a most glorious view. I was going to retire, when she called me, and made me sit down beside her.

"See," said she, "the remains of the mist hanging on the sides of the mountains ! Is it not like a veil of silver gauze of a thousand folds, furling and unfurling, and now floating lightly over the hard outlines of our rocks. Now it descends, and melts away. Ah ! Gabrielle, how magnificent is Nature !"

"You know, madame, I am not inclined to sadness ; and yet to my surprise, when I contemplate a scene like this, a sentiment of melancholy seems to creep into my heart."

"I do not know," said she, "whence that impression arises, unless, perhaps, when we see the wonders of Nature spread out before our eyes, we feel that between her and ourselves there is a certain discord. We are not on a level with her ; and when she is so charming, and so peace-

ful, a voice within reminds us, that we are a blot on the picture."

"You do not think, then," I asked, "that by living in communion with Nature one may attain to harmony with her, and join in her songs of gladness?"

"Oh! yes; I believe it often happens that her gladness steals over us; but she, too, is not always joyous. It seems, sometimes, as if she wept with us, and over us. When no noise is heard—when the air is still, and the birds are silent, and when a grey curtain covers the deep azure of the sky, could you not think that sorrow had gone forth from us, and cast a shadow over the fair face of Nature?"

"I wish so much, madame, that you would tell me all you know of grief!"

"Wherefore? Why anticipate experience?"

"I am afraid life appears to me too fair, and that I shall be disappointed some day."

"Say, rather, that you have scarcely tasted its beauty."

"You cannot be in earnest, or else you know not under what colours I look upon it."

"What you see, Gabrielle, is a brilliant varnish. But to know the end of life—its meaning, its worth, the remedies for its evils, the consolation for its sorrows, you need to live a few more years. Would you understand me if I were to tell you that happiness is harmony restored? And when I add, that this acute suffering, which renders the hour that passes, minute by minute, sometimes difficult to support, I yet accept, because it comes from God—do you feel that I am speaking a language strange to you?"

Madame de Vaudreuil spoke with gentleness; the ex-

quisite grace with which she was endowed lent a charm to her grave, almost austere, expression. I dared not reply to her immediately, for she seemed absorbed in thought.

"Madame," at last I said to her, "perhaps if I knew your history, I should understand your words better."

"I have no history," she said.

"Oh!" I cried, "I am not curious about extraordinary events, but rather of the way in which your thoughts and sentiments have been developed. In this sense, surely every one has a history."

"Tell me yours, then," said the Marchioness, not without a shade of irony.

I blushed, for it seemed to me that the wind, the insects, the birds, and the very branches that cracked in the wood, repeated mockingly the foolish dreams which had hitherto composed my life.

The Marchioness, not wishing to remark my embarrassment, added—"It would afford me much pleasure to tell you of my early youth; but I must avoid all useless excitement, and I could not tell you without emotion of the father whom I have lost. Ask M. de Lussac; his memory is crowded with reminiscences of that time."

I did what Madame de Vaudreuil authorised me to attempt. My guardian very kindly complied with my wish; but in trying to reduce the narrative to what he thought the level of my comprehension, he deprived it of all interest; so I will not reproduce here the fragments with which he gratified me, but relate all I have gathered then, and since, from letters, journals, and recitals, relative to the past life of the Marchioness de Vaudreuil.

CHAPTER III.

JEANNE lost her mother at a very early age. The only daughter of the Count d'Aubertois, she learnt from her tender childhood that she was her father's sole joy. She therefore felt responsible for his happiness ; and this thought was constantly present with her, and imparted a certain earnestness to her turn of mind. She loved her father dearly ! They understood one another so well, and resembled each other so much ! Jeanne, who loved so ardently, required boundless love in return. She had given so much, and received so much from her father, that all below that standard appeared to her of little value. Those numerous friendships of a secondary order, which come and go, and pass away, which animate life for a few moments, but which have no power to trouble or rejoice the heart, remained unknown to her.

Jeanne was scarcely sixteen when the Count d'Aubertois was attacked first by the disease which ultimately laid him in his grave. She felt immediately that a great calamity hung over her ; and, unable to drown her fears, her thoughts were incessantly bent on the event which (for so it seemed to her) must destroy for ever her happiness. To cheer the last days of her father she made

extraordinary efforts ; she concealed her distress, and smiled on the poor invalid, that he might not be grieved by her tears. Thus, she early learnt that the crowning effort of love is to silence the yearnings of the heart.

Among the very few friends whom the Count d'Aubertois willingly admitted, first, as he reclined in his easy chair, soon, near his bed of sickness, was the Marquis de Vaudreuil. Brought up amidst the traditions of a past age, which was dear to the invalid, this young man, otherwise full of eager and generous aspirations, employed his brilliant talents rather in criticising the present, than in pursuing the future. He felt vaguely that his first bold step might carry him a long way ; and, although he meant, sooner or later, to lay his hand on the holy ark of established belief, and to examine what it really contained, he was restrained by a sort of chivalrous devotion to the past, a kind of family punctilio, and, above all, by that fear of the unknown, which often seizes those for whom it has suffering in store. In the meantime, before renouncing his opinions, he carried them to exaggeration, as if to satisfy himself of their truth. Nothing could be more noble, more poetical, or more thrilling than his language, as he defended the throne and the altar. The Count d'Aubertois applauded him, in spite of his sufferings, when Victor, whose passionate feeling lent bitterness to his irony, inveighed against the recent elevation of the Citizen-King, the theories of the day, the new-fashioned manners, and that soulless literature, which laid claim to originality, because it was so fantastic.

"Well, Monsieur," said the Marquis, one day, after drawing a very graphic description of public opinion,

"there is one thing France will hear of no more, that is—principle. No one must say now, this is true, that is false; our generation is tired of such language. We must be content with stating the ruling passion of the day, without questioning its legitimacy; and our generation will make her calculations subservient to her passions. But duty! morality! justice!—she cannot endure the bare idea of such things! Society has no foundation—its superstructure is not cemented by any common principle; and France, given up to the empire of circumstance, seems to have renounced all intercourse with mind."

"And yet," observed one of the friends of the Count d'Aubertois, M. de Beaugency, whom I have already mentioned, and who was listening with a satirical air, "there never was a time when the general intellect was more active; and if France does not believe in all she once believed, she is yet capable——"

"Capable!" interrupted the Marquis, "and of what? Of reducing to theory the facts which square with her passions, and of readily changing her theory when her passions require it. But to deduce facts from principles—from a belief, to act consistently with their convictions, this your philosophers will never do. For this we must return to religion. She alone is a sure guide, a sufficient foundation."

"If France returns to her faith," said the Count, "perhaps she will owe it to you."

M. de Vaudreuil replied by a modest inclination; but the very praise which seemed intended to bind him to his words, roused a spirit of independence within him, and he seemed to decline it with a look which meant, perhaps,

"Do not be too sanguine in reckoning upon me." M. de Beaugency smiled. "These modern ideas," said he, "achieve conquests sometimes where it is least expected."

The Marquis, without replying, took up a pencil, and drew caricatures of the principal men of the day,—and so well, that the invalid was almost consoled for the success of antagonists so cleverly ridiculed by Victor.

A wish to divert the Count was not the only motive that led M. de Vaudreuil to his house. He knew that Jeanne scarcely ever quitted her father's room; and the hope of meeting her, and the desire of pleasing her, contributed much to his assiduity. The young girl, who could conceive of no greater happiness than that of conversing with M. d'Aubertois, thought Victor's visits very natural. She was very glad to see him come so often; and when he succeeded in cheering the invalid, she looked at him with gratitude: However, too much absorbed to perceive the attachment she herself inspired, she had no leisure either to weigh the merits of Victor or to investigate her own heart.

After some months of painful suspense, the Count became rapidly worse. Jeanne was never contented unless she were near, and watching over all that was done for her father. She was nearly exhausted with fatigue; but she never even perceived it. M. de Vaudreuil shewed great solicitude. He entreated her one day so earnestly to allow him to take her place sometimes, that at last she consented. She felt more confidence in Victor than in any other person.

One evening, when the Marquis came to take his place beside the bed of M. d'Aubertois, he found Jeanne in the

room next to the one in which her father reposed. The door was open; and sitting near the fire, her head supported by her hand, the young girl listened for the slightest noise. M. de Vaudreuil had never before been alone with Mademoiselle d'Aubertois. She received him with simplicity, too genuine for him to feel flattered, and murmured some words of gratitude in so feeble a voice, that he could scarcely hear her. She appeared sad, but calm—that calmness which strong natures possess, and in which they clothe their sorrows. M. de Vaudreuil was struck by it. He gazed with emotion on that delicate frame, which revealed but little of a spirit so indomitable; grace, beauty, and talent had scarcely allowed him to divine the mighty mainspring which should neither be displayed nor employed too often. He asked Jeanne whether she felt at all less anxious about her father.

“No,” she said; “there is no longer any uncertainty; I know my lot, but I am calm. I shall be so as long as he lives, because it is necessary for him that I should be so. You love my father; but to love as I love, is what you cannot understand. When an affection is the mainspring of existence, that by which we breathe and live, how can we endure to see it broken?”

“Certainly,” said he, “love begets suffering; but who, to avoid suffering, would renounce love, or love but feebly?”

“Oh! do not fear that I could speak lightly of earnest feeling,” she replied, with the same freedom as if she had been speaking to her father. She was so absorbed by one thought, that all else was forgotten, and she yielded, unreservedly, to the desire of pouring out her heart; and

she thought neither of M. de Vaudreuil's age, nor of her own, nor of this *tête-à-tête*, which was their first.

"What is life without passionate feelings?" she continued. "To false sentiment they are indeed a dangerous auxiliary; yet, what true sentiment is complete without them? And yet, I confess, I fear I have not assigned to my filial love its right place. My father has often said to me, 'Your love for the creature cannot be too great, but that for the Creator should be greater still.' I have never been able to feel this. I have believed in religion, because my father believed in it, and, doubtless, that is the reason it affords me so little consolation."

Jeanne spoke in a low tone, for her father was sleeping, but she laid great emphasis on her words. M. de Vaudreuil felt his heart beat as he listened to her. He loved her too much not to enter into her grief; but, in sympathising with her, he could not lose sight of his own hopes. Not for the whole world would he have expressed them then, for he understood that she ought not to be diverted from her sorrow; but it was ineffable happiness to him to feel that in that solemn hour he was her consoler and her support.

"Do you not think," said he, "that the best tribute we can pay to those for whom we mourn, is to love what they have loved, to pursue what they have pursued?"

"Oh, yes! I long thought that I should have nothing to do in the world when I lose my father; but I now feel that I must continue his work on earth. And you, who know and appreciate him so well, do you not feel that you will necessarily attach yourself more and more to the convictions which he has defended all his life?"

The invalid stirred; Jeanne hastened to his bed-side;

he still slept. She watched for some time the pallid countenance, which already bore the seal of death ; and feeling that she needed more strength for the solemn hour which was drawing near, she retired, leaving Victor with her father.

A few days after, M. d'Aubertois expired without pain, murmuring the name of Jeanne, and with his hands clasped over his crucifix.

His daughter was with him ; she gazed at him fixedly, and could not believe that all was over. There she remained, silent and trembling, holding her breath, and trying to discover some sign of life. At last, her uncle, M. de Lussac, succeeded in removing her from the sad spectacle. He led her to another room, and spoke tenderly to her ; but she did not heed him. Her countenance was pale, impassable, and she shed no tears. Victor had remained to close the eyes of M. d'Aubertois ; he came from the room, and placing in Jeanne's hands her father's crucifix :

"There," said he, "is the consolation he leaves you."

The poor child sobbed aloud. She pressed the crucifix to her heart, bathing it with tears, and gave vent to the heart-rending expressions of a grief too long pent up, and which nothing seemed to soothe.

Madame de Chambrie, her relative, had hastened to offer her services. She took Jeanne away with her to the country ; and M. de Vaudreuil, as he saw the carriage which contained them drive away, made to himself a solemn promise to replace him whom Jeanne had lost. It was a great and solemn promise—was he able to fulfil it ?

For a long time, Mademoiselle d'Aubertois was in a

state of such deep dejection, that she could converse with no one. Almost always shut up in her own apartment, sometimes she gave way to bursts of sorrow, which exhausted her—sometimes, seemingly unconscious, her heart dried up from the excess of her suffering, she had not courage to recall the past. Indifferent to all that might happen to her in the future, she sought no consolation. From her infancy she had respected religion, because her father respected it; she had practised it, because her father practised it; but there was nothing personal in her devotion, and always between herself and God there rose a great idol. The idol was broken, but the remembrance of it still filled her heart; her eyes fixed on the ruins of past happiness, she sought no help from God.

At last, when in the very depths of suffering and anguish, Jeanne raised her eyes to Heaven. With all the ardour of her soul, she entered into the sacrifice; and touched to the heart by the amazing love of God, she discovered that her sorrows were destined to raise her life to a higher level, to purify her affections, and to draw her towards higher regions. Without much discernment, she applied herself to the most minute observances which fervent, but unenlightened, piety could suggest. But who would not forgive the young orphan her error, since, notwithstanding that error, communion of the soul with God was no longer unknown to her?

In the place of earthly love, so sternly torn from her, love, immortal and divine, had sprung up in her heart.

Entrusted by his party with a mission of a delicate nature, requiring his absence from home for a time, M. de Vaudreuil did not see Jeanne again for some months.

His sudden appearance at Chambrie gave Mademoiselle d'Aubertois unfeigned pleasure. Happy in being able to talk to one who had shewn so much sympathy in days of sorrow, she discovered that Victor was dear to her. She related to him all that she had experienced, while he told her of the political schemes in which he had been engaged ; and they both rejoiced together : he was glad to find her devoted to the Church which was to support the Throne, and she to find him devoted to the Throne which was to restore the Church—and thus they fancied they understood one another, and their attachment increased.

M. de Vaudreuil possessed, besides, every attraction likely to captivate the heart of Jeanne. His ardent feelings, his acute reason, the brilliancy of his conversation, softened by a tinge of melancholy, the mixture of passion and irony, of energy and depression, spoke to the young girl's heart. She loved Victor with all her soul ; she promised him her hand, and gave it to him as soon as her mourning was over.

Happiness, which bade fair to be without a cloud, dawned upon the young couple.

CHAPTER IV.

If, after a great bereavement, the soul cannot recover all its elasticity, nor feel unmingled joy, even in the midst of happiness, yet it can be restored to harmony, sufficiently to enable its possessor to enjoy the bounties life has in store. Madame de Vaudreuil felt this; and although the violent shock she had received, left indelible traces on her heart, and a shade of melancholy on her pensive countenance, she yet gave herself up without reserve to the new affection which had become the centre of her whole life. Passionate in her devotion, she was less so in her requirements, and still less in her desire for happiness. That impetuosity of feeling which she was able to restrain, but not to direct, had given way to exquisite moderation, the offspring of sorrow and religion. Madame de Vaudreuil felt that the desires of her soul could find satisfaction only in God, and her love for the creature became less interested, but not less ardent.

She was admired, but not understood, by the world. Her extreme delicacy of feeling avoided all display, but was constantly betrayed by the grace of her manners, and the perfect consistency of her words and conduct. There was so much charm in the involuntary, half-finished revelations gained from the varying expression of her coun-

tenance, that the most inquisitive could not wish to know more. Without claiming attention, she always obtained it, and that fair surface, beneath which lay so much of past sorrow and present happiness, veiled, without concealing it, one of those earnest and richly-gifted souls, which command respect, even while seeking retirement. It was easy to see that her heart was not motionless, but at peace.

Madame de Vaudreuil tenderly loved her husband, although she was at times rather dismayed at the impetuosity of his character, and the adventurous flights of his mind. She could not always follow him with perfect security. She listened with fearful pleasure, while he defended the opinions which had been her father's ; but the motives he advanced often surprised her. Beneath language apparently the same, she discovered discrepancies, for which she could not account, and which troubled her. Was her mind too narrow, or her intellect too lowly for her to understand her husband ; or was there really some essential difference between them ?

Monsieur de Vaudreuil practised religion readily and willingly in its easy forms, but his enthusiasm was not warm, nor his conscience difficult to satisfy. He admired and encouraged the piety of his wife. He went with pleasure to hear eloquent preachers, and rejoiced that his party possessed such good auxiliaries. What struck him most at mass, was the great number of auditors. Religion with him was nothing, individual or personal, but a useful institution, a system convenient for the mind. He was glad to shew his devotion to it, because it was generally attacked ; and his generosity found pleasure in exerting itself in the cause of the weak.

Strong convictions, while they give energy to the soul, give it also cause to rejoice; for to be conscious of strength, even though it be spent in protests, is a source of joy, of joy purer than that of victory. Often, in the hour of triumph, a man loves success better than his principles; or, if he be a man of noble soul, the fear of losing success makes him love the victorious principles less. Attachment to a cause altogether lost, or at present hopeless, raises and fortifies the heart, and devotion to the falling standard calls forth the noblest qualities.

Such was M. de Vaudreuil's state of mind, when he made acquaintance with a priest, who, ere long, gained great influence over him. The Abbé Mervil was a man in whom gentleness and sternness were combined. Ascetic in his conduct, inflexible in his principles, of an ardent disposition, he was fitted to exercise influence over high-minded men, so difficult were the sacrifices, so painful the abnegation he required. He spoke with unction of the joys of a life wholly consecrated to God; and when from the pulpit he described, with enthusiasm strengthened by experience, the ineffable pleasure which follows upon the entire sacrifice of self, a thrill of fear and delight ran through the congregation. His pale and emaciated countenance, his high stature, and his solemn voice, added to the effect of his words.

The Abbé Mervil soon perceived the deficiencies in M. de Vaudreuil's Christianity, and wished to lead him to stricter and more practical views. "Religion," said he to the Marquis, "is with you only a prejudice, not a matter of faith. But it must become a new life within you. Inward experience must respond in your soul to every detail of

doctrine and worship. To attain this, you must form a closer acquaintance with religion, consider it more narrowly ; not content with admiring it at a distance, and as a whole, you must penetrate to its essence, and contemplate its truth."

M. de Vaudreuil did nothing by halves ; an opinion once adopted, he carried out thoroughly. He considered it a point of honour not to draw back. When his friends praised his zeal, and sought by their eulogiums to attach him more completely to their party, he was not sorry to testify his independence by some act of rebellion. But when they accused him of lukewarmness, he thought he could not do enough to satisfy them of the contrary. Partly from excitement, partly from a wish to be consistent, he gave way to all the exaggerations suggested by his new director.

Madame de Vaudreuil had never felt so happy. To devote themselves together, to serve God together, to seek only that which is true and right—what unmingled happiness ! It seemed to her that their mutual love became more holy. The happiness with which her heart overflowed, shed its rays beyond, clothing all things with its bright hues ; and in every object so lightened up, she found a fresh cause for joy. Such is the privilege of the happy ! Yet she was not elated at her happiness ; on the contrary, in her moments of greatest joy, she was as composed as though something solemn had happened to her.

It was about two years after Madame de Vaudreuil's marriage that she went to Chambrie to visit her relations. It was autumn, and Nature seemed to mourn her fading charms. The leaves fell slowly, and the sun's rays pene-

trated with the heat of a different season. These last fine days before winter are dearly cherished ; we enjoy them as some good thing from which we are on the eve of parting, and a tinge of melancholy mingles with our enjoyment. The Marchioness knew not that Nature offered her a true image of her own future life. Her happiness since her marriage had been increasing every day. No branch had been torn from the tree, no withered bough cut off from the trunk. The trunk itself had remained sound, the lightning had not stricken it, the rigours of winter had not dried its sap. She knew not that such trials awaited her, and yet she hastened to enjoy the sunshine, as if she had foreseen the storm. It may be, when the mind fails to discern, a secret foreboding warns the heart that its joys are of short duration ; or it may be, that seeing the decay of nature, we seek with more avidity for something lasting.

One morning, when Madame de Vaudreuil was sitting on a bench near the chateau with her husband, and her little boy, who was a few months old, on her knees, M. de Beaugency passed near them in his walk. The somewhat old-fashioned ideas of the Marquis amused him as some mediæval curiosity would have done, and afforded him, besides, the enjoyment of feeling his own superiority. He took a peculiar pleasure in watching his mental progress, and how, by his very independence, he had placed himself under a yoke, insupportable to intellects less lively and less bold. He foresaw the probable phases of a character of his stamp, and smiled maliciously as he perceived how little his friend was conscious of the transformations through which he must pass.

victions. You have raised a wall between yourself and the opinions of your adversaries ; it is not surprising that they have never troubled you. You received your opinions all ready cut ; they have cost you no trouble ; they form a perfect chain, and this I confess is very convenient. But, believe me, if, in examining them more closely, you find one proof which does not *prove*, your distrust will soon extend to all."

M. de Beaugency's words did not at first make any impression on the Marquis. He was amused to hear his friend predict the different phases he was to pass through. By degrees, however, he became impatient and weary of hearing him so repeatedly declare that he would not remain attached to the faith he held, when he knew the objections opposed to it ; and to shew how little he feared them, he determined to examine them. The Abbé Mervil confirmed him in this intention, and encouraged him to occupy his leisure in refuting the enemies of religion.

Removed, on account of his opinions, from all public employment, M. de Vaudreuil had had much time at his own disposal, and had profited by it for study. Although still very young, he knew much without being learned, for having neither order nor method in his researches, and following whither his inclination led him, he read first on one subject, then another, according to the taste of the moment. He was more conversant with the past than with the present ; he understood it better ; and, preferring for his intellectual life an age which flattered his prejudices, he was fain to forget the present and its questions, at the sense and bearings of which he only glanced. He read modern books with a spirit of contempt, and a mind so

prejudiced as to render them almost unintelligible to him. He concluded that the opinions of his adversaries were absurd as well as pernicious ; and when an argument struck him, he would shut the book in vexation, saying it was odious thus to appeal to bad passions.

To accomplish the new task he had imposed upon himself, M. de Vaudreuil was now entirely occupied with the arguments against religion. He wished to get a thorough knowledge of them, hoping to be better able to refute infidel writers, by having, so to speak, lived in their atmosphere. He devoted himself to the study with all his habitual energy ; and as it was with him both a habit and a necessity to impart all his thoughts to his wife, he communicated to her each day the result of his labours, sharing her indignation at the bold tendency of the spirit of modern days.

Thus the winter passed.

By degrees, however, M. de Vaudreuil, without relaxing in zeal in his researches, appeared to pursue them with less confidence. He was often thoughtful, sad, and silent when subjects were discussed which formerly interested him. Sometimes, instead of working, he would pass hours absorbed in reflection ; and in the evening, when the Marchioness was accustomed to ask him how he had employed the day, he would reply with a discontented air, that he required diversion, and could not constantly be occupied with the same subject.

Madame de Vaudreuil was not immediately alarmed at this change in her husband. Thoughts of high import are a heavy burden for the human mind. Man discovers, when considering questions of the highest order, such dis-

proportion between himself and them, that his own weakness is made apparent. The soul then feels how limited are her powers. Every one may have experienced this ; but when, not content with discerning the true and beautiful, a man tries to embody them in words, and bring them to reality, this evil increases. Unlike the king in the fable, the gold touched by the writer changes to dust ; and the struggle which ensues between the mind striving to embody the ideal, and the ideal which flies, ascends, and disappears, freely and proudly, wearies and discourages the aching soul. Madame de Vaudreuil thought her husband felt something of this wearying so inherent to all serious study ; but he was suffering from another cause also, and this she did not discover.

In the spring, they went together to Vieilcastel. This property had belonged to the Count d'Aubertois ; and the Marchioness had spent much of her childhood there. She had many touching associations connected with it, which she imparted with pleasure to her husband. He listened to her with interest, but became every day more reserved in the expression of his own feelings.

"Why do you not allow me to share your thoughts ?" she said to him, one day. "My father used to tell me his, and I understood them ; I should understand yours too. Have you no longer confidence in me ?"

M. de Vaudreuil smiled complacently, and repressed a sigh, but did not answer, and the young wife felt too timid to insist. She was too unselfish to feel hurt by it ; but she saw there was a constraint in the intercourse between herself and her husband, and this discovery made her feel uneasy. One morning, going into M. de Vaud-

reuil's library, she was surprised that her husband did not seem to observe her. His back was turned to the door, and he rested his head on his hand.

"You are determined not to see me, Victor?" she said, gaily, advancing towards him.

She leant over his shoulder, and took his hand, and saw that his face was bathed in tears, which he sought in vain to conceal. She was deeply moved. She had never before seen M. de Vaudreuil so much agitated.

"Oh! my love," she exclaimed, "what is it that afflicts you? Confide it to me. Does compassion for the unhappy ones who deny religion oppress your heart? Come out with me. Nature will calm your agitation, and my sympathy may perhaps soothe your sorrow."

She said these words in a low tone, and not very hopefully. Her husband appeared vexed to be found by her in this state of agitation, and she felt embarrassed.

"You think me much more sensitive than I am," he said, in an abrupt manner, passing his hand across his eyes; "I must have fresh air; that is all."

He went out without saying more; and soon after the Marchioness heard the gallop of his horse's feet in the avenue. Certainly there was something she did not understand.

Their constraint increased every day. To hide the agitation which was wearing him out, M. de Vaudreuil pretended to take a lively interest in subjects really indifferent to him. While he spoke of them with vivacity, he appeared absent. His wife smiled sadly when she saw him take little Roger in his arms, and play with him, apparently gaily, while his thoughts were evidently elsewhere.

There is nothing so insupportable as restraint ; and when we begin with silence towards those we love, we are soon not able to endure their presence. M. de Vaudreuil remained whole days in his study ; his wife, grieved, astonished, not understanding him, and not feeling at liberty to ask, without confessing herself to be unhappy, suffered deeply. Often in her lonely walks in the long avenues of the park, she would ask herself anxiously if this silence was to last. Then, when she allowed herself to fancy some circumstance which should open her husband's heart, she began to dread the disclosures she might receive. Her fears were vague. She was too inexperienced to understand the nature of the danger ; but she foresaw some impending blow to her happiness.

CHAPTER V.

THE day after their return to Paris, at the commencement of winter, M. and Madame de Vaudreuil went to spend the evening at Madame de Chambrie's. There was a large party assembled ; and they were struck, on their entrance, by the great commotion which prevailed in the room. Every one was speaking, every one was indignant, and exclamations of surprise and horror were escaping from all lips. The cause of Catholicism or of Henry V. must have received some serious reverse, such was the universal excitement; young and old, grave and gay, all seemed animated with the same sentiments. M. de Chambrie, leaning against the fireplace, was speaking with great vehemence. He held a book in his hand, and read passages from time to time in a loud voice, as if to give more weight to his words, shaking his head with the air of one who relieves his conscience by inveighing against his neighbour.

The crowd was so great that the Marchioness could with difficulty get across the room. At last she found her way to Madame de Chambrie, who, begging her to take a seat beside herself, gave her a rapid explanation of the cause of all the commotion. The book of M. de Lamennais,

entitled, "Affaires de Rome," had appeared that morning, and great was the general indignation against the apostate priest. The Marchioness changed colour as she heard the recital. She felt disturbed ; and, turning quickly to some ladies of her acquaintance, said—

"Oh ! I could not have imagined such a thing could come to pass. After having believed, to believe no more ! To preach independence after having made his submission to the Church ! Ah ! how much he is to be pitied who survives his belief !"

The ladies to whom Madame de Vaudreuil addressed herself appeared little edified by the compassion she expressed. Strong invectives were more appropriate, they thought, to the subject. It is remarkable that women generally are more bitter than men. Not having always at hand reasons for the support of their opinions, they give way all the more to their feelings, because they have no other weapons ; like the warrior, who, when his hands were cut off, still clung by his teeth to the enemy's vessel, they are more anxious to express their hatred than to do harm.

The Marquis had approached M. de Chambrie, and a large circle formed round them. Madame de Vaudreuil, seated at some distance, tried to listen to what her husband said. She saw by his countenance that he was much impressed by what he had just heard, but on which side she knew not ; and this uncertainty agitated her.

"After all," said M. de Vaudreuil, and his wife caught these words, "after all, there is nothing very astonishing in this step of M. de Lamennais. Whoever has observed his tendencies for the last few years, cannot be surprised

that he ends in abandoning the Church. It is impossible to be only half detached."

"But he should not have detached himself at all," said M. de Chambrie.

"Certainly, if that were possible. But is it? Unless we live entirely cut off from all communication with our fellow-creatures, how can we entirely resist the influence of their opinions? If we are at all consistent in our reasoning, the moment comes when we must compare the ideas received from religion with those which come to us from the world. Then we perceive their antagonism; and as, in spite of all efforts, no one can entertain two opposite opinions, one must give place to the other. Either yield to a blind devotion, or follow your intellect at all hazards. M. de Lamennais has chosen the latter part, and I cannot blame him for it."

"I did not expect," said M. de Chambrie, "to find in you a defender of one of our enemies."

"And why not, if he is in the right? It is these half-determinations that do so much harm in France. It is so easy to make up one's opinions out of fractions of other men's ideas; every one takes what suits him, and is then bound to no particular course. Principles are dreaded like slavery. Instead of following where premises clearly laid down would lead us, we prefer having mangled opinions, until we get one adapted to the circumstances of the day; and this ought not to be so. All opinions should spring from a common inspiration. If the first inspiration fades, well—let a man seek for another; this is the chief end of life. For myself, I must say, I like to see a man governed by his mind, instead of using it to his own interest, and to serve his own calculations."

The great vehemence with which M. de Vaudreuil spoke caused a sensation. Some one observed, "That to be so absolutely consistent, would expose one to the mercy of all doubts that might arise in the mind ; and that one might follow them, not knowing whither they would lead."

"Yes, let them be followed out," cried M. de Vaudreuil ; "let it be tried whether there be any means of solving the great problems of life. Religion imposes solutions much less intelligible than the problems themselves. I am tired of this obscurity, tired of the concessions and compromises between faith and reason. I wish to see my way clearly, and not to remain for ever with my eyes closed in the face of questions which agitate the world."

These words caused some excitement in the group assembled round M. de Vaudreuil. He threw himself into a chair, as if to escape from the crowd, either regretting he had said so much, or grieved that his opinions were really such as he had expressed. People looked on one another inquiringly, and were on the point of raising conjectures, when M. de Chambrie exclaimed, with a forced laugh—

"Well, you always are so original, my dear Vaudreuil !"

"Do you think so ?" replied the Marquis, in a tone the very calmness of which brought to his countenance the expression of deep sorrow which his vivacity had effaced ; "Do you think so ? Ah ! believe me, what I feel is nothing extraordinary ; it is the inevitable result of the factitious life which is marked out for sincere and fervent believers, like us. From the cradle, religion takes hold upon us, filling our minds with prejudices and ideas ready formed, and substituting for the travail of our soul, deci-

sions of her own wisdom. Then we are launched into the world. Then we find problems different from those she has solved for us, objections of which she warned us not, and experience whose lessons she did not teach us ; and how can we remain as we were ? But, in the meantime, we have become attached to religion, to her emotions, to her poetry, and, especially to the state of security in which she has kept our intellect ; and it is only with heart-rending sorrow that we can part from her."

"Do you mean to say you are no longer a Catholic ?" asked M. de Chambrie, with some asperity.

"I mean to say that I intend to bring up my son as a heathen, as a man, if you prefer that term, and not as a Christian. I shall impose no creed upon him. Afterwards, if he require them, he shall form his own convictions. These at least will be durable. He will be spared the pain of rejecting what he once believed, of forsaking what he once worshipped. A belief, even a well-founded one, cannot remain in a serious mind, because another has implanted it. The mind abandons it, if only to reconquer it, and so to possess it by its own efforts. Wherefore, then, should we plant in the mind of a child, that which must eventually be rooted up, for to do so will but ensure him many a fruitless struggle ?"

It was excessively unpleasant to M. de Chambrie for a man of his own party, and his own family, thus to express himself in his drawing-room. He hastened to stop the conversation by introducing another subject.

Madame de Vaudreuil had long known that a cloud threatened her happiness, but she had in vain sought to discover its nature and its weight. Too much surrounded to

be able to hear all that was said in the group near her husband, she had yet caught some words. She understood that Victor either believed no longer, or believed less than he did before ; and this idea, penetrating her like a ray of light, filled her mind with grief, and her agitation became visible. She did her best to conceal it ; but as soon as she could, she quitted the assembly to return home.

When in the carriage with her husband, they were both silent for some minutes. At last she said—

“ Victor, do you then no longer believe ? ”

“ No,” he replied, sighing deeply ; and both were again silent.

On their arrival at home, Madame de Vaudreuil earnestly desired he would frankly explain himself to her ; but he bade her good-night, and passed to his own apartments, and she dared not detain him.

She felt bewildered and sick at heart. The thought that her husband was, or would become, one of those men without religion, against whom he had so often strongly spoken, appeared incredible to her ; was it not some cruel delusion ? But no ; she had herself heard him commend an apostate priest, propose to bring up his son far removed from the teachings of the Church, even regret that he had himself received them. Had she been deceived in him ? or was he changed ? And she had thought till now that their union had drawn them nearer to God, that they possessed the same faith, were actuated by the same divine love ; and now what an abyss between them ! And if God did not fill it up, how far would it extend ? and when cease to separate them ? She rose, and approaching the cradle of her son, she saw little Roger with his eyes

half open, for he was scarcely asleep, and a smile played on his lips. Had the mother's sighs disturbed the sleep of her child? She rocked him gently, and clasping her hands: "My God," said she, in a low voice, "be the Father of my child. Permit him not to abandon Thee. Take him rather at once to Thyself."

Frightened at her own prayer, she would perhaps have recalled it, had not the door opened, and M. de Vaudreuil appeared.

"Jeanne," said he, "I hope you are not ill; but you seemed to be suffering as we came home."

The Marchioness, laying a finger on her lips, and pointing to the child, went with a light step towards her husband, and would have replied to him, but her voice failed her, and she burst into tears.

"O my beloved!" said the Marquis, "why are you so much distressed? Is not our affection the same? Are our hearts less united? What difference of opinion can separate souls that have been one like ours?"

He spoke in accents so tender, and with a look of such deep love, that Jeanne's tears were stayed.

"I was right," he continued, "in keeping silence, since to guess at my thoughts made you so unhappy. I wished to spare you useless agitation, and—shall I say it, Jeanne?—to spare myself. I thought that by not giving utterance to the new ideas which had taken possession of my mind, I should rob them of their influence over myself. For I do not like these opinions; they disturb my repose; they spoil my happiness, and I would give much never to have entertained them."

The Marquis was deeply affected. As a man, who,

losing his footing on the brink of a precipice, and stopped in his fall by some feeble plant, whose root he sees giving way, measures with trembling eye the abyss ready to receive him, so M. de Vandreuil, restrained by religious sentiments, habits of childhood, valued friends, and a beloved wife, could not without terror contemplate the scepticism which threatened him.

"Ah!" said Jeanne, "why adopt opinions which make you so unhappy? Can that which only makes you restless be true? How have you come to this? Why abandon the sure refuge which religion offers, only to fall into doubt? What is left in your heart? Is there still any truth remaining, or is all overthrown? Oh! tell me, I beseech you, tell me that our hearts may still meet in the same worship!"

M. de Vaudreuil did not at once reply; afterwards, taking his wife's hand—

"Jeanne," he murmured, "I can only tell you the plain truth. I believe no longer. All the doctrines which I once received on the authority of the Church, I discard with my belief in her authority. I confess to you that I rejoice to be free from this slavery, and if any remnants of love for old associations, if the fear of the unknown future which opens before me, cause me sometimes to feel sad, my mind at least is proud and free. It hopes to conquer, it *will* conquer sooner or later."

"Thus, then," said the Marchioness, "the vain reasonings of your mind have made you forget all those delightful emotions, the bounteous gifts of divine grace, the many days passed in confidence and in peace! Oh, Victor! who would have thought the day would ever come,

when you would despise religion and regard it as a yoke!"

The tears of the Marchioness began to flow afresh. Her husband said all he could to console her. He was too sincere to promise what he could not fulfil; but he allowed her to hope that his doubts might be dissipated. Had he no fear of infidelity? and did not his soul tremble at the thought of launching into the vast ocean of doubt? They spoke without reserve a long time; and the young wife, less distressed, but more sad, felt in the midst of her grief that the confidence of her husband was an alleviation of her sorrow.

As for M. de Vaudreuil, when he was alone he again examined his heart, and found that his former faith was indeed overthrown. His opinions of all things must be formed anew; and he experienced a degree of terror in the discovery. Did he regret the loss of what now appeared to him a mass of lies and superstitions? Was he dismayed at the long labour which awaited him? or was there not, at the root of this religion that he rejected, under empty words and false formulas, under unmeaning pomp and show, one fact, one single fact, disfigured, overladen with extraneous ornament, but true, and speaking to his heart?

O God! will Thy truth never be fully proclaimed? Shall poor wandering souls never find Thee but in the bosom of error? Will the day never come, when, escaping from the cloud of false religions which throng the world, Thine unsearchable love shall shine forth before all Thy creatures, in its pristine beauty, in all its adorable immensity?

CHAPTER VI.

M. DE VAUDREUIL, after having been a believer, and after having felt that his life depended on his faith, could not easily accustom himself to see before him, instead of delicate and closely-written characters, a blank page, on which, as yet, nothing was traced. His former state of security was gone. He was not one of those men, who, living in complete ignorance of God, and of the destiny of man, and his relations to the Invisible, are absorbed in things of earth, and deaden their soul to spare themselves the trouble of satisfying its demands. His requirements, which had not been very imperious so long as he thought he had a reply ready for every question, became much more so in sight of the difficulties which suggested themselves to his mind. He thought that without some end, some object to pursue, life in reality was of little worth. A trivial object, an interested or ambitious motive can not satisfy an elevated mind, which is always seeking for the link between terrestrial existence and things above—between matter on which it acts, and the spirit which alone gives a meaning to actions.

There are minds resigned to ignorance. Accustomed to uncertainty from the time of their awakening, they

endure this dangerous condition, and it becomes to them a second nature. Those, on the contrary, who have begun by believing, cannot live without a strong belief. If their first creed fail to retain its hold, they labour till they find another, and suffer for ever if they do not succeed. Hence the great advantage of early belief—belief in anything, true or false, real or chimerical. First opinions stand for little in general; they occupy an empty place, which is afterwards filled by the lessons of experience and reflection. The essential point is the thirst after truth, which the soul retains.

To appease this thirst, M. de Vaudreuil had recourse to philosophy. He thought he should here find what he wanted, and he applied to the study with passionate energy. Was he right? or was he expecting more than philosophy could bestow? There is, I acknowledge, a great use in philosophical inquiry, enough to make me regard it with respect; for it inevitably conducts every earnest mind to despair. This result is in my eyes sufficiently beautiful, desirable, and rare, for me to praise the science which leads to it. Despair, if we examine it closely, is at the root of every life; it is the daily bread of most minds, but they do not confess it. They disguise it, dress it up, and ornament it with flowers; yet for all this, it is ever present; for without Christ, despair is the true state of man. We must acknowledge this stern fact; philosophy constrains us to do so. Good and evil!—that terrible contradiction against which philosophy is so often wrecked. Evil!—that desolating fact which can only lead the reason to desolate conclusions. Ah! how good it is for the soul to behold the misery of the human

state ! How the thirst increases—how the desires are quickened ! But, alas ! how few seek in earnest the new fact which is to console and raise them out of the dust !

The great error of those who give themselves up to the search after truth, is the belief that if they find it, all their wants will be satisfied, whereas the mind alone will be so. Our faculties are dependent one upon another ; and if one is nourished at the expense of the others, the whole moral system suffers. The heart must love the truth which the mind perceives, and activity be exerted for its realization and triumph ; and how is this possible, so long as evil, death, and an inscrutable God are alone discerned by the intellect ?

M. de Vaudreuil did not at first acknowledge this. He was conscious of his own strength ; he rejoiced to use it ; and not doubting the success of his efforts, he experienced real pleasure in the pursuit of studies so much in unison with the spirit of his mind. The only thing which grieved him was to see his wife so decidedly condemn his new tendencies. He was hurt at this, as if the devotion of Madame de Vaudreuil had no other motive than to place obstacles in his way. He could not forgive the Marchioness for believing what he once believed, for practising what he once practised. There are no opinions a man detests so much, as those he once held in high estimation, and has since rejected. He grudges the sacrifices he once made to them. M. de Vaudreuil tried to gain his wife over to his objections and his sympathies, but in vain. She had found in religion, not a system, but an answer to the desires of her heart. Living in close communion with God, she could not abandon Him. The Marquis was very

much annoyed, and his vexation, without being expressed, became daily more evident to Madame de Vaudreuil.

She had never before been so unhappy. To lose a beloved friend by death is distressing, doubtless ; but the assurance of one day meeting him again, imparts a kind of heroism to the soul, which certainty alone can produce. But to have this friend near to you, living, still amiable, and endowed with qualities which make him dear to you, and to see him every day grow more distant towards you ; to find that your dearest and most sacred sentiments alienate him from you ; without power to fill up this breach, or to become reconciled yourself to its existence ; to be obliged to blame one who was once your guide,—this, this is one of those sorrows which have no name, and which God alone can fathom.

She saw too well how much her husband was hurt by what he called her superstitions. He became cold towards her ; he no longer spoke to her of his thoughts, of his labours, of his occupations ; he lived another life from hers. The passion which had absorbed his mind, dried up his heart. It is on our knees that we must seek for truth. To obtain her, we must first be worthy of her. All paths are closed against us, if we do not aspire after the good, as well as the true. Ah ! his pride would not allow him to pursue goodness. Did he not already possess it ? His honourable life, his upright conduct, those bursts of enthusiasm, that generosity always ready to diffuse itself abroad,—did not all these answer for his moral excellence ?

Can it be true that as we advance in life we lose the qualities which have adorned our youth ? A man was generous, and he becomes prudent ; he was devoted, and

he becomes selfish ; full of feeling and enthusiasm, and he becomes cold and supercilious ; or, rather, did he before only appear to possess these qualities ? Perhaps others give us credit on account of early promise, and regard as virtue in us what was only the promise of virtue ? May it not be also that every germ which does not take root in the soul, poisons the soil with its sterile dust ? Madame de Vaudreuil asked herself these questions with trembling.

Formerly her husband's love was most tender, and expressed in many delicate ways. He delighted in making the thousand little sacrifices, which, without any value in themselves, yet meeting us at every step, are precious as repeated testimonies of love. It was no longer the same. That her husband still loved her, she did not doubt ; but his affection had taken another form. He wanted to shew her his superiority ; to make her feel it ; and the indulgence of self-love seemed to have most charm for him now. He wished to be admired rather than loved by his wife. His importance had become so great in his own eyes, that it appeared to him quite natural to exact devotion. He considered himself worthy of it, and claimed it, without thinking that by so doing he robbed the Marchioness of the only happiness she coveted,—that of exceeding his wishes.

M. and Madame de Vaudreuil were seldom now alone together. They had renounced all private discussion. Far from drawing them nearer to one another, such conversations only served to shew how great was their separation. They avoided all exciting topics ; and their intercourse, formerly so full of confidence, became cold and

restrained. They had nothing to say to one another ; and all their efforts being employed in keeping silence upon what most interested them, they dreaded the moments when they should be alone.

One evening, the first they had spent at home for a very long time, M. de Vaudreuil drew from his pocket a pamphlet which had just appeared, and proposed reading it aloud to his wife. She glanced at the title, blushed, and said, in a tone of hesitation—

“It is by an author whose works the Abbé Mervil has desired me not to read.”

“Well !” interrupted her husband, closing the book, and rising with a look of displeasure, “we can no longer converse, we can no longer read ; an agreeable home, certainly ! But I am ready to do whatever you like.”

He opened his library, and after glancing over some of the shelves—

“Here,” said he, as he brought an immense folio volume, “here is something to divert us.”

It was a book of theology written in a quaint old style, the forgotten work of some monk.

The Marquis, looking half vexed, half amused, began to read in a monotonous voice.

“How the Abbé Mervil would be edified,” said he, at length, “if he could see us thus occupied ! What is more touching than to see two young people on the threshold of life occupied with serious thoughts !” Then he began to read again in an ironical tone.

“You surely do not think,” said the Marchioness, gently interrupting him, “that I have the bad taste to admire what you have just read ?”

"I do not know, indeed," said he; "we may expect anything from people blinded by devotion."

"Yes," said she, very gravely, "we may expect anything, really anything in this life."

M. de Vaudreuil's irritation would certainly have disappeared, when he heard her sad and resigned remark, had not the door at that instant opened, and admitted the Abbé Mervil. The Marquis had long studiously avoided him; and as he saw the Abbé advance with all his habitual dignity, the idea struck him that this interview had been arranged by his wife, and all his pride rose within him.

With an easy, though rather impertinent air, he advanced to meet the priest, led him to a chair, and said a thousand of those little common civilities, which, spoken seriously by a sensible man, are so little complimentary to him he addresses. But the priest, who possessed over M. de Vaudreuil all the advantages of conscience and enthusiasm, cut short this shew of politeness, and came at once to the point. "I am particularly glad to meet you, Monsieur," said he, "because you have need of me."

"Very true, M. l'Abbé, I have need, great need of you just now, to solve some scruples. You were always famous for coming just at the right time. Under your enlightened counsels my wife is become a model of devotion. For myself, I dare say, she has already told you that I am very free in my opinions, of rather an independent character, and that I have the fault of saying generally just what I think. I fear that my free way of expressing myself may be injurious to Madame de Vaudreuil; and it seems to me, that as you have judiciously

prohibited her certain books, which I should have had pleasure in reading to her, you might also forbid her listening to my words. The injunction would have the merit of novelty, and would be quite in your style, I think, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"It is strange, sir," replied the priest, "without seeming to notice the sarcastic words of the Marquis, "it is strange how prejudice leads to error. The novelty of your suggestion may be a recommendation to you, but not so to me. I have only old things to say to you. Cease to give way to thoughts so dangerous to your safety. Return, and submit to the Church; and, after having been a faithful sheep, do not become a ravening wolf. It is too late to prevent your fall; but do not reject the hand stretched out to help you to rise."

For one who chanced to enter the room at that moment, it would have been difficult to say if M. de Vaudreuil's manner indicated extreme politeness or extreme mockery. But there was no witness; the Marchioness, foreseeing a storm, had escaped from the room.

"I am very grateful," said he, "for the kind sentiments you express towards me. I am satisfied of the goodness of your intentions; but intentions are not enough. Of course, when you advised me to refute the enemies of religion, you had no idea, by that means, of estranging me from your belief. You imagined me either firmer, or more simple than I am; perhaps you are too much alarmed on my account now. But be reassured, Monsieur l'Abbé; be reassured, I am yet neither Jew nor Pagan. When I am tempted to become either, I will have recourse to your superior light."

"My superior light!" exclaimed the priest, "and who dare speak of his own light? Certainly, Monsieur, I have been grievously deceived in you. I presumed too much on your strength of mind; and, believe me, your falling away is not one of the least burdens that weighs upon me. I have perhaps destroyed your soul through intemperate zeal; day and night this thought is present with me; it humiliates and torments me. Ah! why have hands so feeble such a heavy ministry to bear?"

"*Deus, ecce Deus,*" murmured M. de Vaudreuil, with an embarrassed air, for the Abbé's austere sincerity had touched his heart.

"You might refuse to hear me," continued the Abbé, without taking notice of his words, "if it concerned only yourself; but I appeal to your generosity to allow me to satisfy my conscience, by warning you seriously of your duty."

There was so much solemnity, so much sorrow, and desire to do good, expressed in the priest's words, that M. de Vaudreuil consented to listen to the long exhortations he delivered in the name of an authority which the Marquis no longer acknowledged.

"Sir," said he at last, candidly, "I have certainly been wrong in speaking to you with so much levity. I hope you will forget it. I respect in you an upright adversary. As to the subject of our discussion, you must allow me to differ from you. I must tell you, also, that it does not suit me that you should continue to be Madame de Vaudreuil's religious adviser. You are too inexperienced, too enthusiastic, too young to be the guide of a woman whose husband you cannot direct. You have no longer our

obedience, Monsieur l'Abbé, but you will always have our esteem."

The priest made an effort to remain calm ; his eyes flashed—he reddened—but he bent his head as if to accept the humiliation. Then steadily fixing his eye on the Marquis, "*Quod si sal evanuerit, in quo salietur?*" said he ; and he left the room. Beneath his look of dignity, there appeared an expression of profound sadness.

CHAPTER VII.

FOR some months past, the assumed satisfaction of M. de Vaudreuil had diminished, and his irritability daily increased. The fact was, that all his study, labour, researches, and comparisons, ended in his no longer seeing the way clearly before him. Far from having found Truth, he seemed to have lost her faintest shadow ; and disappointed, unhappy, and crossed in the most imperious desire of his soul, he was also wounded in his pride. He could no longer bear contradiction,—a very natural consequence of having proved his own weakness ; for he felt it an insult, an allusion to the defeat which it cost him so much to confess even to himself. All Madame de Vaudreuil's tact failed before such susceptibility.

The following winter he would not go into company. Solitude suited best with his morose disposition. No longer being able to assert his opinions with warmth, as he had been accustomed to do, he had ceased to find pleasure in society. To be lost in the crowd of ignorant, unthinking, or sceptical people, did not at all please him. Besides, he had not yet renounced all hope, and he laboured constantly to arrive at some conclusion. He passed all his evenings in his study, working eagerly, almost passion-

ately ; sometimes pacing up and down the room to calm the tumult of his thoughts. His wife remained alone, watching the slumbers of her child, with the recollections of happier days gone by, and the bitter suggestions of the present. She prayed for her husband, beseeching God to enlighten his mind, and soothe his troubled heart.

Sometimes M. de Lussac would come and take her for an hour to Madame de Chambrie's ; but much as she had formerly enjoyed conversation, her heart was now too sad for her to take pleasure in it.

One day, the Marquis, more discontented than usual, entered his wife's apartment. What good, thought he, have all my studies done me ? Can the knowledge of truth, which always escapes a man, be designed for him ? and if not, why live ? What is the meaning of this whimsical destiny which makes us its playthings ? Have we any part to play in this world ; and if we have, what is it ? Why, endowed with faculties so inadequate, are we to contend with these dreadful questions which we can neither solve nor forget ? The earth is beautiful, mankind is active, and the works of man are great ; but what good is there in all this ? We are not, therefore, happier, or more at peace, and why are we not ?

The Marchioness soon observed her husband's state of mind, and tried to divert him by kind words ; but as he did not reply, she supposed he preferred silence.

"What is this ?" said he, after a few minutes, playing with a rosary that lay on the table.

"You know, Victor, it is a remembrance of my father."

"It is strange," said he, "that you should reproach me with want of memory. How can you expect a man, occu-

pied as I am with important subjects, to remember for ever what touches a woman's sensibility ?”

“ I did not reproach you,” she said, “ I only answered your question. My one desire is to see you happy.”

“ If that were the case, you would try to contribute to my happiness ?”

“ My husband,” she replied, “ tell me what you expect from me. If I have done wrong, I wish to repair it ; if you have a grief which I can soothe, pardon me for not having anticipated it.”

“ And why should I, since you do not even regard those you already know ? How many times have I shewn you my dislike of the superstitious observances you practise, and yet you persevere in them. When I enter your room, my eye is offended by a rosary on the table, a crucifix against the wall, or a range of devotional and absurd books ; and what is worse, instead of trying to draw nearer to me, you cherish thoughts which displease me. It vexes me that you should spend your days in musing over my errors, and imploring pardon for my sins.”

“ You know well,” she replied, smiling, “ that no one loves you so much as I do ; but no one, not even you, Victor,” she continued, gravely, “ could make me renounce my religion.”

She let her work fall from her hands, and looked at her husband with affection, and seemed to beseech him not to be harsh with her ; but he obstinately kept his eyes turned away, and in a dry tone said—

“ I know well I have but little influence over you ; and that you care little for the wishes I express. But I must tell you, it is ridiculous for a woman to pretend to

know the truth, when the most enlightened men can scarcely obtain a glimmering of it. You ought to be guided by me. Do me the favour," he added, confidently, "to give up with a good grace these childish observances, which are unbearable to me. Confess that you belong to the Church and her doctrines more from habit than conviction. Cannot you make me this sacrifice?"

There was something affectionate, almost tender in the tone of the Marquis, as he pronounced the last words. His wife was touched by it, she felt the tears start to her eyes, and could not reply. She had not courage to banish the smile from her husband's lips, and yet she could not renounce her faith. The Marquis knew why she was silent. He rose with a look of displeasure, and, leaning against the mantelpiece, he looked at Madame de Vaudreuil resentfully.

"I had hoped for great happiness," said he, "but you refuse it me; I must learn to do without it. The world and life offer but few joys to the heart. Labour is in vain; truth escapes us; mystery surrounds us; and on this stormy sea, whose waves toss us about without mercy, there is no beacon to shew us the port, no star to pierce the darkness. What is to become of us in this absence of all good? Are we to drown our cares as the multitude do? To superior minds, this is impossible. There is but one thing that can soothe the anguish of him whose eyes are open to the miserable condition of humanity: the sympathy of a beloved being, the feeling that he is not alone in this awful struggle. But you obstinately remain in an imaginary port, lulled with chimerical hopes. I did not expect this of you. Ah! how well I remember the

time when you shared all my impressions, when we were of one mind, and you were indeed to me the wife of whom I had dreamed ! Alas ! what has become of my dream ? Instead of mingling your existence with mine, you have chosen an independent path, and left me alone. Well ! enjoy your liberty now ; we will live each alone ; doubtless it was for this that our lots were cast together !”

“ O my beloved !” cried Jeanne, taking her husband’s hand, “ I beseech you calm this unjust indignation. I too remember a happier time ; but is it for you, who left our common faith, to reproach me with our want of union ? Have I not yielded all that was in my power to yield ? Have I not listened with interest to your arguments, and even admitted some of them ? I have acknowledged mistakes, and abandoned exaggerations. But to sacrifice my faith, my hope to you, how can I do this ? Ah ! if you only knew how the heart is consoled and refreshed by drawing near to God ! There we find all we need, happiness, truth, strength——”

“ Yes,” said he, “ strength to resist duty. Well, I hope my natural energy will be sufficient to overcome your religious fancies.”

These words, spoken in a dry, hard tone, made the Marchioness start. Her pride was roused, as she heard such terms applied to what she held most sacred.

“ Do you mean to say that you intend to force my conscience ?” she asked, eagerly.

M. de Vaudreuil smiled disdainfully, took his hat, and left the room.

After his departure, Jeanne remained motionless. She was bewildered by what she had heard. Never before

had her husband used such words to her. The thought of the future made her tremble. Were the days of union and happiness indeed gone beyond recall? To recover harmony, must she sacrifice her most cherished convictions? No, that would be impossible. Must she then remain at variance with her husband—at variance with one already so unhappy, so distressed? In the midst of these sad thoughts, she remembered it was just five years that day since she left the Church where she had united her fate with the Marquis de Vaudreuil. When alone, what schemes they had made for the future, or rather one single scheme—to love one another always, to live for one another, to unite in all things their hearts and minds. And to-day!—Alas! what a change had five short years worked!

Tears, long restrained, now flowed from her eyes; she fell on her knees before God, and poured out all her sorrow in broken prayers to Him. Little Roger had been quietly playing in a corner of the room; but when he saw his mother's tears flowing fast, he ran to her, pulled her by the gown, looking earnestly and inquiringly into her face. The Marchioness took her son on her knees, and tried to smile at him. He stretched towards the table, and began to play with the rosary. Poor child! thought the young mother, he will grow up in the midst of storms! What is to become of him at the tender age when firmness and stability of purpose are so necessary? What effect will all these doubts and agitations have on him? And her tears fell again.

A servant came to say that M. de Beaugency was waiting in the drawing room to see the Marchioness. Roger

ran thither immediately ; but he was less gay than usual, and M. de Beaugency perceived it.

"What is the matter, Roger ?" said he, taking the boy up in his arms ; "you are not merry to-day."

"No, I cannot laugh."

"Why not ?"

"Because mamma has been crying."

"Because you have been naughty ?"

"No, because her beautiful rosary has been broken."

"Ah ! Roger, you have broken it ?"

"No, no," said the child, smiling, "it was papa."

"Are you quite sure ?"

"Oh ! yes, for he was angry, and he opened his eyes so wide, and spoke so loud, that I was frightened."

M. de Beaugency kissed the little mouth, and put the child down ; he did not wish to hear more. Nothing whatever had appeared of the estrangement between M. and Madame de Vaudreuil ; yet, from what he knew of their characters, and the altered opinions of the Marquis, he presumed that their domestic happiness could not be unclouded. He pitied Jeanne ; for, he thought, if men are intended to see things as they are, women are intended to soothe themselves with delusions, and it is cruel to awaken them from their dreams.

The Marchioness entered at this moment. Her beautiful countenance bore the traces of sorrow, but sorrow that she could command. She received M. de Beaugency with all the grace and affability that harmonised so well with her strength of character.

"I hear, madame, that you are leaving soon for the country ?"

"Yes, in a fortnight I hope we shall be on our way to Vieilcastel."

"That is very soon."

"My husband is tired with his long studies. It is difficult to lead a studious life amid the distractions of Paris, and I think the quiet of the country will be good for him."

"I have remarked," said M. de Beaugency, "that he has been rather dejected of late ; but you must not on that account be alarmed. The health sometimes appears shaken, when it is only the mind that is disordered."

"Certainly, Monsieur, that is a strange way of consoling me."

"It appears so to you, because you have not yet learned that the mind always recovers."

"In that case, why do you often make such sorrowful reflections ? You do not believe in truth, nor in goodness, nor in enthusiasm, nor in any of those things which make the great charm of life, and yet sometimes you sigh, as if you regretted them."

"What would you have, madame ? There are some wounds well closed, the scars of which remain for ever."

"And they are sad scars," said the Marchioness.

"Happily, you are not called to experience this sort of thing," he replied ; "but as you may have to be a witness of such, it is well for you to know beforehand the probable result."

M. de Beaugency seemed so persuaded of the perfect ignorance of the Marchioness, and so desirous of coming to her aid by his explanations, that she could not forbear smiling, telling him she could wish for nothing better than to be instructed by him.

"There are," he said, "persons born with their eyes turned earthwards, who never raise them. These have no illusions and no history. They are often practical, honourable men, and, above all, active. Others, on the contrary, on their entrance into the world, are lost in a maze of chimeras, hopes and desires never to be realised, but which they take for reality. The moment in which they perceive their error is sad, certainly ; you would think, such is their sorrow, that they would never recover ; they themselves have no hope. M. de Vaudreuil is in this critical state now. But do not fear, madame ; the time will come when he will discover that things are in a pretty exact relation to the requirements of human nature, and that, in reality, partial truths are more useful than absolute truth, which he in vain pursues. He will, by degrees, accommodate himself to the existing state of things, and find out that, take it all in all, life is after all supportable."

"That is to say," she replied, "that by extinguishing in our minds all that is noble and generous, by turning a deaf ear to our wants, and stifling our aspirations, we may become happy. Ah ! let us have suffering, rather than happiness at this price."

M. de Beaugency smiled. The idea appeared to him graceful from the lips of a young and beautiful woman ; but he thought, "I fear my counsel has not helped her. She does not understand my wisdom. Well, I have done at least what I could."

O wisdom ! why is such inadequate experience called by your name ? why do such puerile conclusions pass for the fruit of your teachings ? No, you are not the drying wind which withers the true, the beautiful, the good, when

the heart and life are withered. Yours is not the cruel laughter whose discordant tones destroy the brilliant visions of our youth. Yours is not the inflexible hand which bends us without pity in the dust of our own illusions. Oh ! no ; I know your smiling face, and the delicate touch which awakes the slumbering heart, and opens the heavy eyes ; and the kind hand which raises by degrees before our astonished eyes, both the golden veil of our imaginations, and the gloomy curtain of disenchantment, to shew us that bright and shining reality which surpasses all our dreams. O wisdom ! will you not tell them who you are ?

CHAPTER VIII.

M. DE VAUDREUIL accompanied his wife and son to Vieil-castel, and then travelled for some weeks in the south of France. He said his health required this, but Jeanne knew that he wanted solitude. On his return, he was less irritable but more sad. He had no longer hope. Truth now seemed to him inaccessible to man, and the condition of humanity miserable, and, what is worse, without alleviation. How should he resign himself to this? Must he suffer, suffer for ever, be devoured by a burning thirst, and find nothing to quench it? His activity, now deprived of its object, for he had given up seeking, was changed into restlessness. He did not taste a moment's repose. All the opinions, which he had successively rejected, passed and repassed in his mind, keeping up a perpetual agitation there. He regretted his illusions; it mattered not at what price, he would gladly have had them back, but illusions will not return. Although he felt how widely he was separated from all religion, yet the religious practices of his wife no longer vexed him. Tired of himself, not knowing how to employ his mind, and reproaching himself for the sorrow he had brought on Madame de Vaudreuil, he yielded for whole days to a fruitless

melancholy, asking, with fear and trembling, if all his life was to be passed thus, in fruitless suffering, in weak and vain wishes.

He would try to divert himself sometimes by climbing the mountains, hoping through fatigue to escape from his thoughts ; sometimes by playing with his child, and so giving repose to his intellect. He had become extremely fond of his son. He would often pass whole hours with him, amused with his childish prattle, and affected by his simple tenderness ; but then, glancing at Roger's future, he pitied him for the struggle awaiting him in life, and his revolted heart bitterly complained of Providence.

One evening, returning from a long ramble, he entered Roger's chamber, while the child was saying his prayers at Madame de Vaudreuil's knees. He listened for some minutes in silence, then snatching up his son, and pressing him closely to his heart : " May God never abandon thee," he cried, " as he has abandoned me ! " And he went out abruptly.

The Marchioness left Roger to the care of his nurse, and hastened to rejoin her husband. She found him greatly agitated, pacing with long strides up and down the room. She went to him, and gazing earnestly into his face, made him sit down beside her.

" My husband," said she, " can it be true—so many researches, so much study, have all only ended in the fatal thought that God has abandoned you ? That word you spoke pierced my heart. I pray you, if you can, efface it."

" Ah ! to efface it from your heart, I must first efface it from my own," replied M. de Vaudreuil, in a tone of grief. " This unknown, this inaccessible God, does not

manifest himself to weak mortals. When I approach Him, and would moisten my burning lips in the cup of His love, I feel a hand that repulses me, and a voice murmurs in my ear, 'No, truth is not made for thee!' Do not tell me that I ought to believe; you have told me that often, and it is in vain! I have known what your faith is, and notwithstanding my knowledge of its emptiness, yet there are days when I would gladly return to its yoke. Many times, when tired of this life of doubt, I have tried to close my eyes, to draw a veil over my intellect, to command my reason to submit, the scruples and obstacles of my mind to be silent, and have repeated, 'I will believe!' But in vain; how could I believe? Do I not know the voluntary delusions which are dignified with the name of mystery? Have not my eyes been opened, and what have they seen? Evil, evil everywhere, and nowhere the explanation of evil or its remedy. I must then submit to be ignorant. See, I have pursued truth, and it is doubt, doubt always that has come to my grasp. God keeps truth among His treasures for others, not for me. One ray from Him would have been sufficient to enlighten my soul, and He has not vouchsafed it to me; He has left me poor and destitute, like the parched-up ground. Would you have me say that God has not abandoned me?"

"I do not ask you to say so," replied the Marchioness, "I ask you to seek God. Does not your error lie in pursuing truth exclusively? Truth is, doubtless, one of the wants of the soul, but not the only one; all wants find their satisfaction in God. When I suffer from seeing you suffer, I do not say that God has abandoned me, but I pray to Him, and He comforts me."

Madame de Vaudreuil would have continued, had not her husband interrupted her. The countenance of the Marquis was sad, and his voice solemn, and he spoke slowly and with great emphasis :—

“You pray,” said he, “and you do well; for you have a God. But I, I pray not, and cannot pray, for I have no God; and to what God should I pray?” added he, with animation. “To your God? I do not believe in Him, and I have found no other. I seek in vain for God—in nature, in philosophy, in my own heart; when I think I have discovered Him, a cloud robs me of my sight, and I remain alone, alone with my vanished illusions, my overthrown prejudices, and the shadow of a happy time, over which I shed bitter tears of regret.”

“Victor,” she said, “if you do not pray, I at least pray for you. Sooner or later my prayers will be heard.”

He smiled sadly, as if to thank her for her good intention. He was no longer offended at his wife's religion; but the pious words she sometimes addressed to him had no more effect on him than the unmeaning burden of a song.

It must be confessed that Madame de Vaudreuil did not always act with judgment. Brought up in the strict forms of Catholicism, she had adopted all without examination. Her mind, at rest and satisfied, could not understand the difficulty of communicating to a more enlightened, and more exacting intellect, the peace which she had found herself. M. de Vaudreuil was silent after the last words of his wife. He resumed, in a tone of despair :—

“There was a time, my beloved, when our hearts were one; we felt united; we were affected by the same joys

and the same sorrows. It seemed to me that in you I saw my own image, only, ennobled, purified, and more worthy to reflect the image of the Deity ; but now——”

“Now,” said Jeanne, “I love you more than before. I suffer with you, and weep with you, and the deepest sentiments of compassion are added to my tender love.”

“I know it,” said M. de Vaudreuil.

“Do you love me then no more, Victor?”

“Do I love you no more!” cried he ; “yes, I love you, but with what torment and anguish ! I love you, and only make you unhappy ; you, so worthy of happiness ! I love you, and see myself more and more separated from you ! The gulf widens between us, ever widens. We understand one another no longer. There is no longer between us that communion of soul which was the charm of our union. I thought at first that I could support this separation ; then it irritated me ; now I suffer from it. The further I go from the opinions I once held, the more you attach yourself to them, and thus a barrier is formed between us, which becomes impassable. The calm of your mind gives me pain, and your peace frightens me. You are an angel, and I, unworthy of you, am reduced to weep over my past happiness, and the errors which at least made me feel happy and gave me peace. What is more miserable than a man without any belief, without any object in life, without hope, a sad compound of trembling negations, and of doubts without an issue ? Ah ! Beaugency was right when he said hopeless scepticism was the end of every thinking man. But I cannot submit as he did. I shall suffer, and struggle, and at last sink.”

He rose as he spoke, and went towards the window.

The setting sun had tinged with a bright light the thick clouds which hung in the air. "Ah!" said he, "the sun of my happiness is also set, leaving the heavens obscured by clouds."

"If it sets in the evening," said the Marchioness, "it is only to rise on the morrow."

He shook his head and was silent. When the last golden tint had disappeared from the sky, he came back to where Madame de Vaudreuil was sitting, and taking both her hands with affection:—

"Jeanne," said he, "do you remember the time when we read together Klopstock's 'Messiah'? I remember the admiration you expressed for the touching episode of Abdiel and Abbadona, the first of whom still dwells amid the glories of the skies, while the latter, fallen from the celestial abode, dared not even to meet the eye of his friend when he perceived him flying through the heavens; he feels powerfully drawn towards his friend, and yet he flies, overcome with grief. O my beloved wife, chosen of my heart! we no longer inhabit the same regions!"

Madame de Vaudreuil listened to her husband in mental agony. Pale, motionless, her hands joined over her heaving breast, she bent her head in silence, and her look seemed to say—"My God, will there be no end to all this?" She recovered by degrees, and spoke in tones too calm not to reveal the strong emotion within.

"You have," she said, "spoken truly. There is a gulf between us. There is one between every man and his fellow-man, till their hearts have met in the bosom of God. Then the gulf is filled up, and the love of the creature, weak and powerless of itself, grows, increases,

and prospers under the breath of Divine Love. Go, follow your own path, wander far from the coast, fly the port. I have hope that God will yet bring you back. My beloved, we shall meet again ! Ah ! may God make us meet again ! ”

The renewal of conversations like this was equally dreaded by both parties. Obligated to appear cold, that the flames which burnt in their hearts might not burst forth, their intercourse became every day more trying. Madame de Vaudreuil was completely occupied with the thought of her husband's distressing state. How could she soothe such sorrow ? How lessen his anguish ? She felt too well her utter weakness. All her efforts were directed to the avoiding of useless estrangement, and yet all ended in estrangement. It was not possible for two persons, who had been so closely and tenderly united, and both possessing deep feelings, thus to carry on a peaceable existence, at variance upon the most important subjects ; what is more miserable than being obliged to choose among our thoughts when speaking to those we love ? And yet they were reduced to this. If, sometimes, insensibly drawn on, one of them touched upon some important question, the conversation, far from bringing them nearer one another, served only more strongly to shew their separation.

The Marquis seldom conversed. The thought that he was the cause of his wife's suffering was insupportable to him ; he had so much desired to make her happy. But he knew perfectly well that he could not bestow a happiness he did not himself possess. Alone, dispirited, desiring above all things to re-establish harmony and equilibrium

in his mind, and able to succeed in nothing, he passed his time in alternate moods of dejection and agitation. At times, when his suffering was most acute, if Madame de Vaudreuil spoke some word of affection or hope, or made allusion to past days, to shew him that he was pitied and understood, an extraordinary emotion would seize him, and he would hasten away that he might not yield to his feelings. She was not hurt at this reserve. She knew that there are occasions when the greatest proof of affection is to abstain from all expression of it, and to treat those we love as ourselves, speaking to them when we wish to speak, or being silent when we will, and even to absent and hide ourselves for a time.

M. de Vaudreuil's malady was not singular. All suffer more or less from it ; but with some it is latent, smothered by a life without reflection, by business, or by pleasure ; and by others it is no sooner anticipated, than it is hidden under illusions. More sincere, or bolder, M. de Vaudreuil had contemplated life in its reality. He found in man a longing after the good, and the good nowhere realised ; the want of truth, and this want never supplied ; the love of the beautiful, and the beautiful ever escaping from his grasp ; quick affections, and these affections the source of sorrow ; aspiration after a state of harmony, and discord everywhere—discord between our opinions and our feelings, between our feelings and our actions, between the world and us, between us and that mysterious Being whom we seek under so many different names. He saw all this, and thinking the evil not peculiar to himself, but at the root of all life and of all society, he became disgusted with all the world, and despised everything.

M. de Vaudreuil had thought it more consistent with his dignity to look this evil in the face, to submit to it entirely, without seeking escape by any miserable subterfuge. He thought so still, but his strength was exhausted. When we plunge repeatedly into darkness, which it seeks in vain to pierce, the eye becomes as much fatigued as in braving the rays of the sun. The Marquis confessed to himself with inexpressible humiliation, that he was not capable of suffering more. He must either be diverted, or forget an evil that it was impossible to bear or to remove.

But how was he to be diverted ; how to be absorbed in trifling occupations, while living with a wife whose heart was devoted to God, whose soul was filled with exalted thoughts, and whose whole life was inspired by ardent faith ? Her countenance so sad and sweet, and her eyes full of memories of the past, of compassion, and even of hope, would not allow him to forget. He saw in his wife a constant remembrancer of all he wished to bury in oblivion. He always felt more at ease away from her, and he was glad to be spared the insupportable restraint from which he could not rouse himself in her presence.

Are, then, all minds led by reflection to the brink of the precipice, reduced to this low state of extreme dejection ? After having tried everything, must he return to the vain enjoyment which satisfied him in the time of his ignorance ? Ah ! if it were so, if it were true that there is no satisfaction for the hunger and thirst of the soul, if the mind must always remain distracted, and the heart desolate, and if so many desires, confused hopes, and vague presentiments were only conferred upon man in derision, then, indeed,

there would be no expression bitter enough for his despair—no blasphemy great enough for his anger. But it is not so ; the remedy exists, and if M. de Vaudreuil had not found it, it was because he had sought it by his intellect alone, for his intellect alone felt the need of it. He had not courage to probe his other wants ; he wished to stop. But God will not have us stop. Sooner or later he forces the lingering soul to resume the journey. We must pursue our way.

M. de Vaudreuil imagined that a long separation from her who knew him better than he knew himself, would be good for him, and perhaps give a new current to his thoughts. After a prolonged absence, he fancied he should be able to come back to her without danger, and devote himself to an active life,—regarding the miserable years he had passed as an unhappy dream.

He spoke to Madame de Vaudreuil of his intention to travel. She was grieved to hear of it, for she knew diversion was not likely to have the desired effect on her husband ; she knew he might conquer or yield, but never forget, as he seemed to imagine was possible. What was to become of him, alone, a prey to gloomy thoughts, without the friend of his heart to understand his sorrow ? Who would whisper in his ear that name of God, which he never pronounced ? Who would speak to him of consolation and safety, when he felt shipwrecked amid the shoals of doubt and despair ? And besides, after a long separation, how would they meet again ? Each pursuing alone a separate path, would they not in the end lose sight of one another ? would it not be separation without hope ?

The autumn was fixed upon by the Marquis as the time

for his departure. He dreaded the final adieus, and allowed his wife to think that he would return to Vieilcastel at the end of a few weeks, previous to his long journey. The month of August was drawing to a close, and Nature's charms were most splendid and enchanting. The snowy mountains in the distance appeared radiant against the azure sky. The plains had recovered their verdure under the influence of a grateful rain ; the flowers bent gracefully on their tall stems, and the trees spread their thick shade on the walks. What was the voice of Nature ? Did she speak of remembrance or of hope ?

The carriage of the Marquis was at the door, but he took yet another turn with his wife and Roger in the park. He appeared much dejected. Madame de Vaudreuil was aware of it, but was so accustomed to see him gloomy, that she did not think much of it. She too was heavy-hearted, thinking of the leave-taking of which this was only the precursor. Her husband walked silently, admiring every turn of the long avenue, every peep through the thick foliage.

He re-entered the castle to find some books ; and glancing rapidly from the window, he saw the Marchioness in the courtyard with Roger. She was shewing the horses to him, and appeared delighted with the childish glee of her boy. She certainly had no suspicion that the long separation was already beginning. M. de Vaudreuil's agitation increased every minute. His heart failed him. No, he could not leave her ; he could not inflict this bitter grief on a soul so pure, on a heart so tender. He laid his hand on the bell ; the servant entered. " Let them take out the horses," he was going to say, but a rapid glance

round the room where he had suffered so much, stopped the words on his lips. He ran down the stairs, hastily embraced his wife and son, flung himself into the carriage, and left the castle. Ah! what thoughts were his, as he was borne away from the home he had made desolate!

Two days after, Madame de Vaudreuil received a letter from her husband, announcing his intention to set out at once on his travels, without returning to Vieilcastel.

"O my God!" she wrote that night in the book where she recorded her thoughts; "I commend him to Thee. Thou hast permitted this famine to his soul, vouchsafe him the food he needs. He knows not what he wants, but Thou knowest, O God! He cannot do without Thee, though he has rejected Thee. If I have sometimes disfigured Thy truth in presenting it to him, help me, O my God! to make use of this time of trial and solitude, for the enlightening of my understanding, that I may become more worthy to make known to him Thy mercy. If my heart break, he will not believe in Thy almighty power. O my God! a little more, and this poor heart must break; but Thou wilt support me, as Thou hast ever done; and grant, oh! grant, that the day may come, when he, whose happiness Thou hast confided to my keeping, shall live as I do, in Thy love!"

Yes, it was indeed on the love of God that her heart lived. It is true, the limited range of her mind made her acquiesce in a narrow and diminished conception of the Redeemer, but her soul had entered into close communion with Christ. She scarcely knew in what vessel to present her treasure to others, but she possessed the treasure.

O Christ! Thou who art the remedy for all our evils,

the solution of all problems, the desire of our hearts, it is but tremblingly that I dare to pronounce Thy name !—Thy name, which has become the synonyme for so many errors. Sects have wished to enclose Thee in their narrow formulas. Human systems have tried to represent Thee as some mythical abstraction. How can I express what I feel ! How can I say what Thou art to me ? Thou, O Christ art He that reconcilest earth and heaven, the great destroyer of evil, the Saviour of mankind ; Thou art also Jesus, the humble carpenter, the son of Mary. Thou art no cold idea for my intellect alone, but a real and loving Being, by whom God is made known to me. A Being and who but a being could satisfy the aspirations of another being ? And who but a Divine Being could satisfy the cravings of the creature ? O Christ ! suffer not man to be ignorant of Thee for ever. Suffer us not to lessen or to disfigure Thy work ! Have pity on us. Ah ! we have such need of Thy pity !

Book the Second.

CHAPTER I.

It was now nearly three months since I came to Vieil-castel. This visit was not without its use to me. Many foolish thoughts and vague reveries, I acknowledge, occupied my fancy ; but if, in the first flights of my mind, I had embraced much that was false, I had at least attained to a presentiment of something better. The constant society of Madame de Vaudreuil had widened my horizon, and had imparted to my gaiety of spirit a feeling of respect for all the deeper emotions of the soul.

I loved the Marchioness still more, since my guardian had given me some details of her life. The thought of what she had suffered, of what she was every day suffering, made her dearer to me. It was now nearly three years since her husband left her. She regretted his absence as much now, as at the first moment of his departure ; or rather her regret increased as the time of separation was prolonged. She felt an intense desire to see him again, to know his actual thoughts, to soothe his troubles.

And she herself was changed. She was no longer ignorant of herself and of life, of the demands of thought, or the objections raised in other minds. Her mind had acquired more breadth, and her heart, always devoted to God, was no longer trammelled by superstition. Her religion was more comprehensive.

We saw very few visitors at Vieilcastel. The most frequent guests were Maurice d'Ermont, and his brother Casimir. The former was very intimate with Gaston, the old friend of my childhood. He was very amiable, but weak, and not possessed of any decided opinions. The latter must, on coming into the world, have forgotten to bring his mind with him. He thought me pretty, and told me so. I was flattered, and his visits, a cruel infliction on the Marchioness, amused me extremely. Not that I paid any attention really to what he said, for his foolish talk could not please me, but his presence gave me an opportunity of displaying before an approving eye attractions which M. de Lussac never observed.

Towards the middle of September, our young neighbours from Ermont brought Gaston de Chambrie with them, who had just come from Paris to seek a little relaxation from his studies in the society of Maurice. I was delighted to see him again. Madame de Vaudreuil invited him to remain a few days at the castle ; and if my powers of coquetry were exerted for Casimir, I was unreserved and confiding with Gaston. He was very friendly with me, and spoke to me without reserve of many things of which I had never thought, and which he seemed to think must be quite familiar to me. This caused me some embarrassment.

One day, when the curé of the village had been dining at Vieilcastel, Gaston proposed to us to mount a neighbouring height to see the sun set. His proposal was accepted, and we set out, each at the speed natural to his age and disposition. My guardian and the curé walked gravely and slowly, while Gaston and I mounted the hill rapidly, not caring for the difficulties of the road. We were soon greatly in advance of the others; and my natural timidity, which was in strong contrast to my spirit of independence, having disappeared, I drew my young companion from his thoughts, by asking him what he thought of Madame de Vaudreuil.

"I have had much conversation with her," he replied, "and am struck by the change which has taken place in her mind. She appears to me to have acquired much more freedom in her manner of judging of things. Her faculties are developed in every sense, and her religion is of a more enlarged character. I think the absence of her husband has been very useful to her."

"How can that be?" I asked. "This separation causes her so much grief."

"That is true," said Gaston. "But for many years past, her strength had been so much tasked to bear, either restraint without, or storms within, that she had neither time nor opportunity for the development of her mind. This trouble was added to all the rest; for though she was not aware of it, I think faculties not allowed to expand, may be a cause of real suffering."

"Since M. de Vaudreuil makes the people he lives with so unhappy, I shall be very sorry when he returns," I cried.

"On the contrary," replied Gaston, "I think you will be exceedingly interested in him. You remember seeing him at Chambrie three years ago. What an affecting evening that was! How we all sympathised in his agitation! Poor Victor! three years of travel and of solitude can scarcely have contributed to his happiness! His wife shewed me some of his letters, so short, so dejected, and I should have said, so insignificant, coming from any other, but from him they signify only too much. He must be very miserable, or he would not, as he does, avoid all mention of himself, and confine himself to such trifling remarks as are to be found in all journals of travel."

"Gaston," said I, after a moment's silence, "I am afraid of life. I came here careless and happy; but now the future appears dark to me. There are so many unhappy beings! I perceive that they who are sheltered from great outward catastrophes, have in themselves some cause of grief. All this troubles me."

My companion looked at me, at first, as if he were interested, then with rather an ironical smile. Perhaps my joyous countenance and laughing eyes, and my usual confident and careless manner, belied the gravity I sought to express by my words. However, he soon became serious again.

"You have reason to be anxious," said he; "there is in every heart a void, which is scarcely ever filled, and which leads elevated minds to indifference or to despair."

"To despair! You do not reassure me at all. What! do you mean that I am on the way to despair?"

"I am very glad," he replied, smiling, "that you are conscious of the elevation of your mind."

I blushed a little.

"Without alluding to myself," said I, "from whence proceeds this void of which you speak?"

"I think," replied Gaston, "that it proceeds in a great measure from the absence of any object or end, in connexion with the true cravings of the soul. We pursue many objects; but none is great enough, universal enough, or high enough, to give to our life the unity which is necessary. We live, but wherefore? We work, but for what end? We amuse ourselves, but is that all? And whither does all this lead? Man requires a vast future for his hopes. The few years before him are too few for his infinite desires, almost too few for the development of his strength. By a fatal mistake, he concentrates all his faculties on trifles. Willingly or unwillingly, here they must stop short, and in the struggle they become lowered."

"Ah! I well know," I said, sorrowfully, "it is frivolity that triumphs over good intentions. It always conquers me."

"Gabrielle," said he, warmly, "you will not abandon your life to the mercy of circumstances. No, you will direct it towards its eternal destination, and not let it float at hazard."

"But what is this destination?"

"I think," said he, "that the chief end of our existence is to perfect ourselves unceasingly in the sight of God."

I looked at Gaston with astonishment. These solemn

words on the lips of so young a man, made a strange impression on me. However, I felt interested, and a new horizon seemed to open before me.

Conversing thus, we had insensibly slackened our pace, and our friends had come up to us. A few minutes more, and we were all at the top of the hill. The sun sank rapidly, flooding the heavens with its golden rays. A few clouds, tinged with purple, floated in the western sky. The birds sought their nests. The long shadows of the side of the forest. All was silent on the mountain ; there was no song in the air, no breeze amongst the foliage, no rustling in the wood. Nature seemed to be quietly fir-trees stretched around us, while some stray sunbeams falling on the thick trunks, shed a yellow light on one contemplating the imposing spectacle she spread before us. I sat down on a little mound of turf, happy to escape from my thoughts, in the new impressions presented to me by the scene. It seemed to me that the various shades before my eyes were reflected in my mind, exciting there mingled emotions of joy, melancholy, and admiration.

Admiration ! Is it then Nature alone that can inspire it ? Must we take refuge in her bosom, if we would feel this sentiment so requisite to the heart ? Are the men of our age so wanting in grandeur, our institutions in ideas, and our literature and art in the ideal, that my pent-up enthusiasm can only find vent where man has not set his impress ? But this admiration is not enough for me ; it is too calm, and too external. The soul, so often disturbed by sorrow, needs not only to be soothed by admiration, but to be disturbed likewise by bursts of

joyful enthusiasm. O quiet Nature ! I contemplate thee until I am full of sorrow ! I long to admire my fellow-creatures, and thou alone in my eyes art worthy of admiration !

The sun disappeared slowly below the horizon. The clouds resumed their sombre colour, and a dull grey light preceded the coming darkness. I rose from my seat, for this pale, mournful shade, after so much splendour, fatigued my eyes, and saddened my spirits. I was glad to hear my guardian say it was time to return. We descended through the wood. The darkness, the solitude, the mountain, and its winding path, all made me tremble. My heart beat, for I thought I could perceive behind the trunk of every tree a phantom ready to spring upon me. The breeze which now agitated the branches seemed a mysterious voice. Every now and then I stopped to listen with fear, then hastened to join my companions, who sometimes by their silence, and sometimes by their confused voices, added to my fear. I stumbled and screamed ; Gaston ran to me, offered me his arm, and soon I felt reassured by his support.

" How sad it is to descend from these heights ! " said I, after a moment's pause. " At every step I take towards the valley, my heart is oppressed, and cold vapours seem to rise around me."

" That is an impression one often receives in life. I am astonished how much courage it requires to be happy."

" Courage, Gaston ! courage is for conquerors or martyrs."

" Well," said he, " is not happiness always a conquest ?"

" I do not understand you."

"Happiness," said he, "is found on the heights, and we inhabit the plain. Reality is justly repulsive to us ; and vulgar minds alone are satisfied with it ; others seek to escape from it, but this is not easy. As we strive to mount, there are trammels which would drag us down. To transform the ideal into reality, the heroism of a whole life is not too much."

"It seems to me, Gaston, that the happiness of which you speak is more gloomy than sorrow."

"Oh ! do not say that," he cried ; "the happiness of which I speak is no deceitful phase of suffering ; it restores the mind to its true condition. The road may be rough, but the prospect before us smooths all the roughness. God has conceived so vast a plan to raise fallen humanity ! Our glory should consist in recognising this plan, and contributing to realise it."

When I was alone in my own room, I thought a long time of what Gaston had said to me, and was grieved to find how little attraction the superior happiness of which he spoke had for me. With all my heart I seemed to cling to that passive contentment in which I had grown up. I would gladly have felt as Gaston felt, but I could not ; and I lay down to sleep, very much alarmed at being disturbed by conflicting thoughts,—a thing which had never happened to me before.

Gaston soon returned to Maurice ; but during his stay at Ermont he often came to see us, and each day I found more pleasure in his society. He certainly kept me a little in awe. However, as he was amused by my playful sallies, and the gaiety of my spirits, I could not find his gravity very imposing.

Maurice and he arrived one day with Casimir, with whose company they would willingly have dispensed. The latter, whom I had really disliked since Gaston's arrival, was seated next to me at table. At first I felt cross, and scarcely replied to his remarks. The foolish pleasantries that he uttered with a sort of foppish assurance, did not make me laugh ; and his attentions, which were meant as gallant, were disagreeable to me. However, as the repast proceeded, I was insensibly overcome by an inordinate desire to please. It was evident that my unamiable manners had rebuffed Casimir, for he had turned with vexation to M. de Lussac. This I could not bear, and forgetting my new ideas of goodness and happiness, and even Gaston's presence, I gave the rein to my powers of coquetry ; and when the desert arrived, I was absorbed in my efforts to display my talents and charms before this despised neighbour.

He looked at me as a connoisseur would, appearing to admire my pretty waving hair, my expressive eyes, and the elegance of my slight figure. He led me back to the drawing-room ; and it was not till I overheard him say to Gaston that he thought me charming, graceful, and very amusing, that I felt my humiliation. Then I saw how much piqued Gaston looked, and I hastened to my room and wept.

At the end of an hour, the sound of horses' hoofs attracted my attention, and I ran to a window that looked into the court. Our visitors were departing. Casimir and his brother had already turned their bridles, and the Marchioness went up quickly to Gaston, and, laying her hand on his horse, as if to stop him—

"Be consoled," said she, with a smile half compassionate, half playful ; and as he did not appear at all consoled—"Go," said she ; "you judge her too severely, and it is not good of you."

"Why does she trifle with me ?"

"She has no thought of doing so ; but she is a child, and you are still more like one."

Gaston smiled. Oh ! how much I loved Madame de Vaudreuil at that moment !

The next morning, having wandered long in the park, I went to Madame de Vaudreuil's room. She was seated in a deep recess of the window, with her embroidery frame before her.

"Is that you, Gabrielle ? Where have you been all this time ? We have not seen you since yesterday evening."

"I have just been walking, madame."

"Well, what have you gathered in your walk ?"

"I have not been idle, for I have formed some good resolutions this morning."

"What are they ?" said the Marchioness, rather maliciously. "Have you been seeking new methods of enchanting my guests ? I was overcome yesterday by your obliging exertions."

"Really," said I, scarcely restraining my tears, "I am unhappy enough ; you ought not to laugh at me."

"Why not ? would you rather that I should read you a dissertation upon coquetry ? It would pass away the time."

"I do not find it too long."

"Yet you never do anything."

"I read, I walk, I work ; what would you have me do more ? women have nothing to do."

"That is just what I would speak of," said the Marchioness ; "it is not so much the employment of your time, as the spirit in which you set about it ; and, generally, I do think that women of the present day think too little of themselves, and this leads to great evils. There are some men who regard women as they do their horses or their dogs ; and women seem pretty well satisfied with this opinion ; and yet they possess minds, hearts, and intellects."

"It is true, madame ; yet I should not like to become pedantic."

"You have such a taste for extremes, my dear Gabrielle, that I expect to see you some day a regular blue-stocking, passing your nights in counting the men in the moon, and your days in analysing substances."

"It is for this very reason that I do not like to part with my ignorance."

"Well," said she, "I wish we were more universal."

"What ! madame, living encyclopædias ?"

"Not at all. But listen. Men have, each of them, a career which absorbs them, and which, as it obliges them to concentrate their attention on some peculiar object, tends to render them exclusive. I would have every woman able to interest herself in the life of the men who surround her, that her mind may become a sort of centre whither the different currents may flow. A woman's part is to make herself mistress of general ideas, even of the principles of things, and leaving the application and details which require outward exertion, she should com-

prehend, and try to inculcate to those around her, all that is good in every sphere ; it is she who must take up the highest cause, the cause of morality, the cause which appeals to the heart ; it is she who must represent this cause in the world, where personal interest threatens to absorb everything. She must preserve the empire of mind over matter. It is a question of good taste, as well as of moral rectitude."

" If I did not fear to appear to you destitute at once of good taste and of moral rectitude, I should venture to ask you a question."

" Pray, venture it."

" Is it by iron, or by fire, or water, that you mean to get rid of all women of narrow minds ? for you will never succeed in making them universal."

The Marchioness smiled.

" Ah ! for them," said she, " they must manage as they best can. But do you not know that it is the privilege of inferior minds to find their place in the world without seeking it ?"

" I did not think you could be so sarcastic."

" I am wrong," said she. " If all cannot discern the true and the good, they may at least cherish the love of them in their hearts, and shed it around them. I do think, too, that silliness is more a fault of character, than a failing of the mind. If one cannot acquire great talents as one acquires a virtue, one may always correct oneself of a certain degree of silliness, as of a vice. A good man is sometimes weak-minded, but he is never absolutely a fool, like——"

" Like who, madame ?"

"No, no, I will not be personal."

"I know well to whom you allude."

"You know! I speak of those whom you wish to please."

"Let us change the subject, madame."

"This one suits me," she said; and leaving her work, and throwing herself back in her chair, she began to speak, with that air of deep conviction that gave such noble animation to her countenance. "The more I think of it," she resumed, "the more it seems to me that women have a great part to play in the world. The muses formerly inspired the poets; it is to women, who are rarely destined to *create*, that belongs the right of inspiring society. They must shew the way to the great end; it is for men to pursue it; and perhaps society would not be at so low an ebb, if women had kept up the fire of enthusiasm in their hearts."

"Alas! madame, there is no place for enthusiasm amongst the realities of life."

"On the contrary," she replied, "the more elevated the point of view, the more we appreciate things at their true value. And yet ——"

"You hesitate?" I asked.

"I was thinking," she said, "that the attainment of the heights is sometimes bought very dearly; but what does it signify?"

"It matters very much to me, for I esteem happiness above every other thing."

"No, Gabrielle, you esteem your dignity still more."

"You treat me rudely this morning. You are laughing at me; and you would tear me from my ignorance,

and make me renounce happiness. It is too bad ; I will not bear it."

The Marchioness took me by the hand, and led me on to the balcony ; then, with a playful air, she said—

" If you fear difficulties, look at that flock of sheep in the meadows ; I will give you a crook and a dog, and you shall go and tend them ; but if not, remember those words of my father's, which have been the inspiration of my life—'It is only the impossible that is worth trouble.'"

I was trying in vain to find something to reply to this motto, when Roger entered the room triumphantly, bringing a letter from M. de Vaudreuil. The Marchioness quitted the balcony to read it. After a few moments, she called her son. She was very pale, and taking the child on her knee—

" Roger," said she, trying to smile, " thy father is coming home."

The child clapped his hands, and would have run to announce the good news to M. de Lussac ; but, when he saw the tears in his mother's eyes, he stopped, and, with a disappointed look, asked if she were not very glad.

" We weep for joy, sometimes, my child."

He looked at her inquiringly, then throwing himself into her arms—

" Mamma," said he, " I will never give you pain."

CHAPTER II.

SEPARATION is one of the bitterest sorrows of life. We do not know that he whom we leave will be the same when we meet again. We love him who went from us ; but shall we love him who returns ? Will the changes we have ourselves undergone please our friend ? And if the absence be prolonged, if it began at a time of crisis, what barriers may there not be raised up between us, what ruins may not meet our view ?

Madame de Vaudreuil awaited her husband's return with real anxiety. It was nearly three years since he had left her ; and during that time the few letters she had received from him told but little of himself. Had he succeeded in the object he proposed to himself ? Had he imposed eternal silence on the agitations of his mind, on the imperious wants of his soul ? or rather, unhappy, as in time past, was he looking into the future, only for a sorrowful repetition of struggles without issue, researches without result ? It was impossible to know ; but, whatever might be the state of the Marquis, it seemed to Madame de Vaudreuil that she was now more capable of understanding him than she had been.

She knew that she must suffer much in seeing her

husband suffer ; in seeing him, as formerly, reject Divine succour, deny Divine mercy, and find fault with what to her was most sacred and holy ; but anything was better than this cruel separation. She could at least devote herself, and bear all that was required of her ; and certainly, from those we love, we prefer injuries, and grievous estrangement, to absolute indifference, to the absence of all communion. The affections of Madame de Vaudreuil were of that deep and passionate nature, that nothing could damp them, but everything, on the contrary, tended to heighten and give them life. Neglect, want of sympathy, selfishness, ingratitude even, towards devotion like hers, caused her intense suffering, but did not abate her love. She gave all, and exacted nothing. Vulgar minds cease to love when they are called on to make sacrifices ; superior minds attach themselves more ardently to whatever rouses their heroism.

As the day approached that was to bring M. de Vaudreuil, the Marchioness appeared most anxious. She could not conceal her discomposure. Sometimes she would read her husband's letters, seeking for some indication of his sentiments ; sometimes, taking Roger on her knee, she would talk to him of his father's return, exciting his impatience by exhibiting her own. I, for my part, felt very desirous to see M. de Vaudreuil again. All that Gaston had told me of him awakened my curiosity in the highest degree. My affection too for his wife, which had been of rapid growth, made me deeply interested in all that concerned her. Without well understanding it, young and ignorant as I was, I had perceived something of the beauty of her character,

and her grief caused me real sorrow. It is an inestimable benefit for us in youth to come in contact with a being who presents to our eyes an embodiment of moral purity, of elevation of heart and life. The admiration we feel preserves us from many falls, inspires the soul with noble emulation, and places a sacred seal on existence. Since I had known and loved Madame de Vaudreuil, it seemed that I had felt of more importance myself. The contemplation of her sorrow stood to me in the place of experience. I fancied myself in her place, and felt for her. It is the privilege of suffering ones to be most tenderly, most passionately loved; and we often see persons who were unhappy in days past, regretting, in the midst of happiness and success, the affection that was felt for them in the time of distress.

One morning, while walking in the park, I perceived a carriage coming slowly up towards the castle. I ran immediately to tell the Marchioness. The colour forsook her cheeks; she thanked me in a trembling voice, and called Roger to go down stairs with her. The child could not contain his joy; he jumped and shouted, merrily repeating his father's name, while Madame de Vaudreuil seemed weighed down by the thoughts that crowded into her mind. They presented a painful contrast. She arrived in the vestibule just as her husband reached the last of the flight of steps before the door. Roger left his mother's hand, and ran to meet the traveller. The Marquis entered, holding his son in his arms; again embracing him, he put him down, and seemed absorbed in his parental feelings. Madame de Vaudreuil kept a little behind, waiting her turn. Blighted affections

make us timid. We dare not venture to express the sentiments of our hearts when we are not sure of the reception they will receive.

Roger, however, disengaged himself from the arms of his father, and drew him towards the Marchioness, as if he reproached himself for having claimed the first caress ; then he flew through the house to announce the happy arrival. M. de Vaudreuil looked at his wife in mute admiration. She was so beautiful, and there was so much love in her look ! He pressed her to his heart.

" You love me, Victor ? " she asked, raising her beautiful countenance to his.

" Can you doubt it ? "

" I might have doubted it. "

" Jeanne, " said he, " you would have been very wrong. "

" Ah ! my beloved, your absence has been so long—so very long. Three years ! And to know nothing all this time of your feelings and your sorrows ! "

She passed her arm through her husband's, and they went together to the drawing-room. " Why, " said he, " do you so reproach me ? Have I not written to you ? "

" Ah ! " said she, " I do not mean to reproach you ; and never will. It is not with reproaches that I would receive you now ; but I have suffered much in your absence, and before being effaced for ever, this thought must be expressed for the last time. Forgive the doubts that have at times poisoned my life. I have been in ignorance as to your feelings and sentiments ; and am so still. The short notes I received from you told me certainly where you were, and whither you were going ; but they told me nothing of the state of your mind. Per-

haps you had nothing good to tell me? But tell me what you feel?—it seems as if I had lost sight of you. Ah! I beseech you, tell me that you love me! I must hear it from your lips; and when I have heard it, never more, I promise you, will I seek to discover the secrets of your mind. But since your departure, I have never once spoken of my feelings. Forgive me this excitement!”

“Jeanne,” said he, “I do love you!—I have never ceased to love you!”

“My beloved, may God restore to you the happiness you bestow upon me this moment!”

“Happiness!” cried he. “Ah! you may be happy; and I would that I could contribute to your happiness. But what can I do? What is an attachment like mine for you? I have nothing to offer you, but the wrecks of my former self. My strength is exhausted; my faculties are stupified; despondency has obtained a complete hold of me. Henceforth I can be of no good to any one.”

“Is this,” said she, “all the fruit of these three long years?”

“No,” he replied; “I have attained the end I proposed to myself. I am calm!”

Calm? Yes; but miserable in the extreme. The hopes of M. de Vaudreuil had vanished with his restlessness. The diversions to which he forced himself to have recourse, had succeeded, it is true, in chasing from his memory difficult thoughts, from his heart its restlessness, and its passionate desires after the true and the good; but they had left behind an immense void, which he had tried in vain to fill up. Unvaried, hopeless dejection was the state into which he fell. For long he had seen the gulf

of scepticism opening at his feet ; he had vainly sought to avoid it, but had fallen in. Now he was at the bottom of the abyss, less restless than when struggling on the brink ; but he had sunk lower than ever.

M. de Vaudreuil's spirit was broken, as a cord breaks when too tightly strung. Excess of life had killed him. Great excitement, after having exhausted his strength, had ceased to support him ; and he became a prey to an ever-increasing melancholy. Formerly his thought soared in space, proud of itself and its power, traversing all regions in pursuit of boundless good, without a doubt of success. Now his mind was still wandering ; but no longer as a conqueror ; like a slave, half dead, it dragged itself wearily along, sinking under the weight of the chains it had forged for itself.

This state of dejection, which is endurable for a listless or craven soul, is perhaps more dreadful than acute pain to strong and active minds. It leads them to despair ; and from despair back again to excitement. It is only with the weak that it becomes chronic. M. de Vaudreuil knew well that it required all his attention to keep up this apparent calm ; and he carefully avoided all exciting thoughts, all serious conversation.

The consciousness that he was unable to do anything towards restoring to his wife the happiness of which he had deprived her, made him still more dejected. The incapacity to do anything for others, or for ourselves, is always a cause of humiliation. He was deeply moved by Madame de Vaudreuil's affection, but knew not how to shew his gratitude. He was often embarrassed in her presence ; for he knew that she would see through the

subterfuges he employed to avoid all interesting subjects. At times, when he launched out into some amusing recital, he observed that the eyes of his wife were bent on him with an expression of compassion and love which shewed that she detected in his heart that which his words would fain have disguised ; and he would be troubled, and relapse into silence, for facts alone were at his disposal ; but if facts possess great interest and value, considered as an embodiment of ideas, as their tangible realization, taken in themselves, and separated from what gives them life, they are only phenomena, at one time fearful, at another insignificant.

M. de Vaudreuil knew that his wife could only be happy when he should be so. He tried to appear happy, but could not succeed ; and great restraint, under an appearance of ease, was the only result of his attempt. There was, however, something sad and touching in his sincere though ineffectual endeavours to do some good.

M. de Vaudreuil's wish was to pass the winter at Vieilcastel. He hoped to keep calmer in this solitary and retired life, than he could do in the bustle of Paris. Immediately after his arrival, he devoted himself to scientific studies of an abstruse nature, which interested his mind, without raising any disturbing question. He worked hard every day ; but great as was his application, it was easy to see that his pent-up thoughts only waited for an opportunity to burst forth.

The education of his son afforded real pleasure to the Marquis. Roger loved his father with peculiar tenderness. He understood him as far as a child can understand a man, and exerted all his powers to soothe a

melancholy which did not escape his notice. And yet, with all his son's affection, M. de Vaudreuil foresaw there would be points of difference between them. He perceived his wife's influence to be greater than his own. Often, when talking with Roger, the child would take up his words, complete the sentence, and even go beyond what his father had intended. There was a whole world of sentiments and ideas to which his mother had initiated him, and in which he was quite at home ; and he did not notice the painful effect this had on the Marquis.

One evening, towards the middle of winter, M. and Madame de Vaudreuil were sitting over the fire. The Marquis, looking at the flame, which shed a cheerful light in the room, was absorbed in thought, and bestowed no attention on what went on around him.

"Have you been very busy with Roger?" asked the Marchioness, after a long silence.

"Not to-day ; I did not feel inclined. Besides, Roger is your child."

"Well," said she, "will you have nothing in common with me?"

"Ah! on the contrary, I would willingly. I know that the union of two hearts is founded less on reciprocal affection than on affections in common. I had hoped that Roger would be a link between us. You cannot think with what sorrow I see the child escape from me. There is already a barrier between him and me. Alas! barriers always—and everywhere!"

Madame de Vaudreuil took her husband's hand—

"My beloved!" she said, "God can pull them down—God can unite our hearts. The more elevated the object

of devotion, the more firm and solid is the union of those who together devote themselves. Let us hope that one day——”

“Spare me your hopes,” said he, sorrowfully, “they give me pain.”

“Ah! Victor, there is a calmness of the heart a thousand times worse than that of the mind; and it is this that keeps you so far from all heavenly hopes. God, I trust, will not allow you to remain always indifferent; He will know how to re-awaken your spirit. May He grant that this awakening cost you not too dear!”

The door opened suddenly, and Roger entered, laughing and bounding with joy.

“Look!” cried he, “look, mamma, what beautiful flowers I have gathered for you in the greenhouse!”

And he threw a bouquet into his mother’s lap, covering her hand with kisses; then springing away, he ran to his father, and almost overwhelmed him with his caresses.

“Oh, papa!” he said, “we shall have such a treat this evening! I have seen in the library a large Bible with pictures, and I will go and bring it for us to look at together.”

Without waiting for a reply, the child ran out of the room, returning immediately with the heavy volume, which he let fall on the table. M. de Vaudreuil drew near to him, and listened with pleasure to the little boy’s prattle. It was a pretty sight to see the child leaning on this old book, looking at the pictures with unfeigned delight. He turned over the leaves quickly, stopping at places which pleased him most, and reading aloud some lines when he required an explanation.

"In the end they will understand one another," said the Marchioness, in a low voice, casting a tender look on her husband and her child.

Roger had been looking at the pictures for some time, when my attention was attracted by the clear, sweet voice of the child, reading with great feeling the following verses :—

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down ; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song ; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land ? "

"How beautiful that is !" said Roger, turning his eyes to his father's.

"Yes, my son, it is sublime poetry : the sorrows of exile could not be better expressed."

"Exile !" repeated the child, with that thoughtful look which formed so strong a contrast to the usual gaiety of his countenance. "There are many sorts of exile, are there not ? Mamma told me, one day, that heaven is our home ; and that when we forget the good God, we are like exiles, and we weep for our Father's house. And you, papa, did you ever weep in the strange land ? Did you ever hang your harp on the willows of Babylon ? "

Roger looked at his father in simple curiosity, without a suspicion of the effect he was producing.

"Yes, my son, yes, my darling child !—it has been hung there for a long, long time."

And, taking him in his arms, M. de Vaudreuil pressed

him with agony to his heart ; and then went out of the room. Roger remained surprised ; he looked for a moment at the door by which the Marquis had gone out ; shook his head as if he renounced all hope of understanding it, and returned silently to his pictures.

Soon after, I heard a noise on the terrace, and ran to the window. A thick snow, hardened by frost, covered the ground. There was scarcely any wind ; but the sky was dark and gloomy. The trees in the distance were covered with rime, and were only distinguished by a deeper shade of darkness. Further off, on the mountain, lights shone out from the cottages. The evening bell was heard in the valley ; but not a sound besides. Nature seemed overcome by the rigour of the season. The woods, the lanes, lately so full of life, now presented only one vast solitude.

In the midst of the darkness, I perceived M. de Vaudreuil. He was walking rapidly, and with long strides. Suddenly he stopped, and examined the state of the sky : not a star was to be seen—all was sombre and still as the ground. He walked again. The desolation of this place accorded with that of his own soul ; but it seemed to give him pain. What pleasure could he find in viewing his own image ? Presently the wind rose, and I heard the sound of an *Æolian* harp, which the Marchioness had placed at some distance from the castle. Then the wind blew a hurricane—the clouds chasing each other across the sky, and giving place to others, that vanished in their turn. There was an extraordinary movement in the heavens. A few more seconds, and all was clear ; while myriads of stars were seen in the azure sky.

M. de Vaudreuil stopped again. I know not whether this sudden change excited some presentiment in his mind, or, perhaps, he envied the faint light that fell on the white carpet of the earth ; or, perhaps, the fearful noise of the tempest, through which the sound of the bell was only heard at intervals, recalled to his mind other tempests—other times of fearful crisis, the remembrance of which agitated him. He stood as if chained by some irresistible force. The brilliant spectacle did not last long. A fresh storm of wind brought back the scattered clouds, dispersed for an instant, and all became again dull and heavy as before. M. de Vaudreuil returned to the drawing-room, took a book, and remained silent.

It required but little to disturb his assumed tranquillity. The spirit within writhed under the iron hand that pressed it down.

CHAPTER III.

TOWARDS the month of April, M. de Vaudreuil was obliged to spend some weeks in Paris, in order to gain information necessary for the prosecution of his studies. I thought his absence, and the calm that would ensue from it, might give the Marchioness time to recover her strength. She was exhausted by each day's restraint, and her features, without losing any of their charm, spoke of weakness and suffering. It seemed to me that in her present state it would be impossible for her to bear fresh shocks—to endure fresh sorrow.

Roger undertook to replace his father. He had never been so tender—so affectionate—with his mother as now. To her he was a source of unspeakable joy; and yet it was almost with a feeling of sadness that she regarded him. Looking forward to her son's future path, she dreaded for him the difficulties of life. She knew them so well herself! At other times, she would take courage for herself and for him; and those terrible struggles which assail our existence, would appear to her glorious, and worthy of being endured even at the sacrifice of happiness. There was in Roger's feelings an exquisite delicacy, which is sometimes early perceptible in highly-favoured natures.

Oh! to see him, with all the candour of his age, as he confided to his mother's bosom the contents of his heart! His beautiful head assumed an almost heavenly expression, and his earnest eyes seemed to behold some vision veiled from the sight of those around him. Charming child! I can never forget thy tender looks and thy sweet words! No cherub face can ever efface thine from my memory!

One evening, he wished to take his mother to the cascade. The day had been hot. Above our heads, the sky was clear, but light vapours had arisen all round the horizon, encircling it as a girdle, while the rays of the sun, struggling to pierce the white veil, gave to its edges a rosy tint. All was calm and serene—no splendour of too dazzling a nature disturbed the harmony of the quiet, soothing scene.

"There is a portrait of Roger!" said I to the Marchioness, calling her attention to the charming scene.

"Oh, no!" she said, quickly, "that is too fragile a beauty. A few minutes more, and there will be no vapours—no light. My boy is more like yonder bright star, twinkling to charm us."

The breeze rose, and it became so cold that we hastened back to the castle. But Roger had been seized by the sudden change of temperature, and a burning fever was upon him that night. The Marchioness did not leave his bedside. As soon as day arrived, she sent to the next village for a doctor, who came immediately; and he, without alarming us much, prepared us for serious illness. I trembled to think of the fatigue awaiting Madame de Vaudreuil, and entreated to be allowed to take her place sometimes beside the invalid. She refused at first, but

after several nights of watching, she granted me my request. She felt she must rest ; perhaps a secret presentiment warned her that she would require still more strength ere long.

I was then installed for the first time in a chamber of sickness. The lamp shed a feeble light ; the little boy slept peacefully ; and in the long hours of night everything invited me to reflection. I had been at Vieilcastel nearly a year ; and in that time I was much changed. I had come with an empty heart, and a head full of fancies. I now felt and understood many things. I was sensible now of duties, as well as of affections. Life was no longer to me an amusing game of little moment—it was a task. I had not lost my gaiety ; but united to grave and serious thoughts, it had become sterling happiness. I was perhaps less joyous ; for my heart, that self could not fill any longer, was wounded in many places. Still I cannot retract the word “happiness.” There are sad emotions, that fear not to dwell in a joyous heart, as there are acute joys that spring up voluntarily in the midst of tears. I have often asked myself if this freight of mingled emotions may not be the most desirable for the frail bark of man, which so often suffers shipwreck for want of being properly balanced.

Towards the middle of the night, the little invalid opened his eyes, and called me. He seemed glad to hear that his mother was taking rest. He covered me with caresses, thanking me for taking care of him. But he could not go to sleep again ; and, until morning, he was a prey to excessive restlessness. The doctor arrived. After seeing Roger, he came out of the room, shaking his head,

and said to the Marchioness, who had entreated him to tell her the truth—

“The illness is very serious ; but there is still hope.”

“Still hope !” she repeated ; “are we come to that ? O my God ! I did not think the disease was so dangerous !”

Madame de Vaudreuil threw herself into a chair, having her elbows on the table, and her forehead in her hands. Suddenly, she looked up.

“Gabrielle, what did the doctor say ? That there was no more hope ? Was that it ?”

“He assured us there was still hope.”

“Yes ! he wished to spare me ! I know what it is ! O my God ! what a sacrifice ! I beseech Thee, demand it not of me ; it is impossible, impossible ! My son ! my only son ! My beloved child !”

Sobs interrupted her. But, by the words that escaped from her lips, I knew that she was struggling against an inflexible will that was not her own. When we are unacquainted with sorrow, its approach stupifies us ; but when we know its cruel pangs, the dread of it throws the soul into convulsions, more terrible than sorrow itself.

“My God,” she said, “Thou art all-powerful ! Thou canst bring me to the earth ; but I am not able to say—‘Thy will be done !’ When alone and in grief, my son has consoled me. I cannot part with him ; my heart refuses. What will become of me without him ? O my God ! Thou canst take him ; but I cannot give him to Thee !”

Then rising impetuously—

“Where is he ? Let me hasten to him, that I may enjoy his presence while I can !”

I stopped her, as she was leaving the room—

"Oh, stay," said I; "your grief is too violent. You will do him harm. In a short time you can go to him."

She sat down again, saying—

"You are right. But leave me alone. Go to M. de Lussac, and beg him to write to Victor."

I hastened to obey her orders; and, after a little time, returned to the Marchioness, hoping to find her calm. She was stretched on the couch, her head leaning back, and her eyes half-closed. At first I thought she slept; for she did not move when I entered. I soon saw I was deceived. The colour on her cheeks came and went—her drawn features betraying the struggle that was going on within. Sometimes she crossed her arms on her breast, trying to breathe freely, and then broke into sobs and inarticulate words. But at last she joined her hands, bent her head, and appeared to be praying earnestly. By degrees a heavenly peace seemed to descend upon her whole frame; and, with a serious and painful expression, she signed to me to draw near to her. I threw myself into her arms; and she held me in a long embrace. A feeble smile lighted up her countenance.

"The sacrifice is made," she said; "God may take my son when He pleases. My heart is broken; but it is at peace."

She was silent. But after a moment she resumed—

"God hears my prayer; and I complain! One evening, I remember, I prayed thus to God—'Let my son never forsake Thee: take him rather at once to Thine arms!' I have never retracted that prayer. Should I retract it now? No, surely; and yet—Ah, Gabrielle, may you never know such grief as this!"

Her tears flowed afresh ; but they were tears of peaceful resignation.

"How like Roger is to my father ! He is his living image. Look at their portraits."

She went to examine them nearer ; and I could only think with trembling, that, perhaps, soon these two portraits would be of equal value in her eyes. I know not if she thought the same. But I saw that she scarcely looked at her son's. It was on the features of the Count d'Aubertois that her eyes rested, as on a treasure which had been long lost.

"I think," she said, coming back to me, "I think I am calm enough now to go to Roger's room."

I encouraged her to go. She took one step towards the door, then came back, saying—

"I have never used dissimulation with my child—he shall know my fears."

I was not at all astonished at these words ; for what I knew of Madame de Vaudreuil's manner with her child, agreed too well with the intention she expressed. She was on a footing of such perfect freedom with him, that though reserve might be permitted, dissimulation could not be. She had never used any of those petty subterfuges, so much in vogue in common education. And she had never stooped to that kind of puerile condescension, so injurious to the self-respect of a young and feeble being. Children soon understand great matters. Unfortunately, there are many women who look upon their character of mother, as one they may lay by or resume at pleasure. Weak and passionate in testifying their affection and tenderness, they adopt a conventional look and manner,

either to blame their children for faults they willingly excuse, or to inculcate principles they only care for as a form. They are not mothers endeavouring to pour their whole souls into the souls of their children ; but indifferent actresses repeating an unmeaning part. The child can see through this double character assumed by her who esteems him so little as to educate him by means of a perpetual comedy. He knows what importance to attach to lessons, so little in accordance with his mother's daily life, that she is obliged to have recourse to a fictitious character, before she can teach them.

There was nothing of this in the intercourse between Roger and the Marchioness. She was always herself ; and as she saw the man in the child, her respect for childhood was great. She appealed to all his faculties, requiring much, particularly of the will ; and treating her son as a being endowed with conscience and responsibility.

I followed Madame de Vaudreuil to Roger's room. She went up to him, and tenderly embraced him.

"You are sad," said he ; "you have been crying. Oh, how glad I shall be to get well, and make you happy again !"

The Marchioness knelt down beside his bed, took the little hands of the child, and looking earnestly at him—

"My darling child !" she said, "if the good God does not please to make thee well again, wilt thou go willingly to those beautiful mansions which are prepared for us above ?"

A radiant smile passed over the child's face, but he did not reply.

"Tell me, my darling !" said his mother, entreatingly ;

"couldst thou leave me, to be happy for ever with God?"

Tears started to Roger's eyes; he put his little arms round his mother's neck, and whispered—

"If you are willing, I will go."

"Well, my only child, let us give up our will to Him who knows better than we do what is good for us."

From this day Roger and his mother spoke often of the possibility of their approaching separation. They strengthened one another, and the Marchioness, though torn with inward grief, had more command over herself, as she knew that her composure was necessary for her child.

"I remember," she said to me one day, "all the delight this dear child has been to me during the eight years he has been given to me. But—shall I tell you, Gabrielle?—when I pressed him in my arms for the first time, a sad thought came across me, and the words came to my mind—'I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.' I tried to dismiss them, but they still sounded in my ears; and the longer I looked at the little, weak, helpless being, crying over its birth, the more deeply was I anguished at the thought that this poor little creature, when arrived at years of discretion, would find himself at the mercy of all the difficulties and dangers of a nature over which evil has established dominion. I understood then how great is the duty of parents, who transmit so perilous a life to their children, to unite in their endeavours to avert its dangers. I have prayed much for my son."

The disease made rapid progress. The doctor gave not the slightest hope. We feared lest the Marquis should

not arrive in time to see Roger again ; and the hours passed heavily with us who watched his decline. Madame de Vaudreuil, who had seemed utterly exhausted when her husband left her, had found new strength. From the moment that her heart and will were broken before God, she regarded the sacrifice as accomplished. She bowed her head in the presence of God, not trying to forget, or to drown her sorrow, but accepting the trial without a murmur.

In the meantime, M. de Vaudreuil had left Paris, without receiving the alarming letters that had been addressed to him. He was already on his way to Vieilcastel. He arrived, and entered the house. No one received him in the hall ; no one appeared at the sound of his entrance ; he hastened up stairs, not knowing what all this silence meant. After passing through several rooms, he came at last to Roger's ; and stood motionless on the threshold. The blinds were closed, and a mysterious darkness, impenetrable to those who came from without, reigned over every object. In one corner, supported by my guardian, I stood weeping. The servants were assembled in the next room, and pressed to the door, sorrowing with us ; for all loved this child with peculiar affection. And alone, at the bed-side, leaning over her child, was the Marchioness.

For a moment no one perceived M. de Vaudreuil ; and he could scarcely distinguish what was passing in this darkened room, only from time to time he heard a stifled sob. Madame de Vaudreuil moved, turned her head, and caught sight of him. She repressed her exclamation, and drawing near to her husband, with that solemnity and

authority which victory over sorrow gives to a feeble being, she took him by the hand, pointed to the bed where Roger lay, and said, in a voice trembling with emotion—

“God is taking away our son ; He asks for your heart ; do not refuse it.”

The Marquis did not reply ; he was awe-struck, and allowed himself to be conducted to his son’s bedside.

The child was now delirious ; he said many incoherent words ; yet sometimes his meaning was apparent under the strange forms the fever gave to his thoughts.

“Why do you stop me ?” he said. “Take away these bands, take them away ! I must go. The wings draw me up ; the angels call me ; the heavens open ; let me go then ; who stops me ?”

Whilst saying these words he was much agitated. His mother tried to calm him. For a few moments he was quiet, and then said—

“Why do you cry ? What do I see ? Where are your harps ? Have you lost them ? Ah ! I know, you have hung them on the willows of Babylon.”

He appeared greatly distressed ; but soon an expression of angelic compassion spread over his countenance, and he cried with a joyful voice—

“Sing with me : Glory to God in the highest ! What ! Angels are joining in our songs. Oh ! I know their voices. Sing yourselves, and then you will hear them.”

The child sunk back on his pillow exhausted, and a more peaceful sleep seemed to refresh him. The Marchioness remained on her knees beside the bed, not venturing to take her eyes off her son’s face. She listened

to his breathing, and dared not move for fear of disturbing his momentary repose. Standing beside her was her husband. His features wore a look of agony, but no tear was in his eye, no word escaped from his lips. Roger opened his eyes again, saw his father, and smiled. M. de Vaudreuil bent over to embrace him. The little boy looked tenderly at him—

“May the good God console you, dear papa!” he said, in a scarcely audible tone.

He feebly pressed his mother’s hand.

“Good-bye, I am going! You are willing, are you not?”

“Yes, my darling, rise to the skies; thy Saviour is waiting for thee; I will not keep thee longer.”

Roger looked up gratefully; he raised his beautiful eyes with an expression of peace and love, and murmured some indistinct words. One moment more, and earth did not possess him. Madame de Vaudreuil embraced once more the lifeless form, and fell fainting into our arms.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME DE VAUDREUIL'S grief caused me deep sorrow. I did not leave her room, and forgot my own feelings in attending upon her. When she came to herself, it was only to weep and to pray. She appeared utterly prostrate, and had no strength to express her feelings. Towards evening, her husband, who had been in and out all day, full of anxiety for her, and thunderstruck by this unforeseen blow, approached her bed to speak to her ; but both were speechless with grief. The sight of this dumb sorrow was distracting. Although the Marchioness was in a state of exhaustion which threatened her health, M. de Vaudreuil's countenance was more hopeless than hers. I could read there the reaction of a violent blow, and the visitation of a heart in revolt against destiny.

Excess of fatigue at last threw Madame de Vaudreuil into a sort of sleep, which brought her neither rest nor refreshment, and did not even ensure a momentary relief from her sorrow. On opening her eyes, she seemed glad to find me beside her.

"Do not blame me," she said ; "your affection does me good."

And after a moment's silence, she added—

"Yesterday I suffered with Roger; now I suffer alone. A thread is broken, and our sweet communion is interrupted. What a distance there is between us! Oh! if I could but get to him! If I could but understand his happiness!"

Roger's nurse entered, weeping and sobbing, as she had not ceased to do since his illness had been declared dangerous. This excellent woman, full of good, but injudicious intentions, brought the child's portrait to the Marchioness, with all the haste of one who had found an infallible balm for a mortal wound. She gave it to her mistress, with the look of one who expected a sign of approbation. Madame de Vaudreuil thanked her, took the portrait, laid it on the bed, and shut her eyes. As soon as we were alone, she said—

"Take that away, we cannot pass so suddenly from the sweetest reality, to an image without life. The wound is too deep."

Ah! indeed she had no need to say it. Her head, which she could not raise from the pillow, her pale features, and the extreme physical weakness that could not support her heart's strong emotion, all spoke plainly of what she felt.

The day passed heavily. At nightfall I glided from the room of the Marchioness to see once more the little child who was so soon to be laid in his grave. I entered the apartment trembling. The thought of finding myself alone with Death made me hesitate. I was relieved by seeing M. de Lussac sitting near the door, and I went to him as if to put myself under his protection. He put his finger on his lips, and turned his head towards the coffin

in which Roger was already laid. Although it was almost dark, I could distinguish the face of the dear child, over which was shed an expression of heavenly peace. There was nothing repulsive, nothing distressing ; it was not death, it was repose. I perceived M. de Vaudreuil near the remains of his son. Leaning against the wall, his arms crossed on his breast, his head bent, and not moving his eyes from the inanimate form, he stood, the image of hopeless, inconsolable, irremediable grief. A sort of stupor had come over him. M. de Lussac said something to him, wishing to draw him away, for so many hours passed in this manner must have exhausted him.

"This is my place," he replied, in a choking voice. He moved to a chair, and falling into it, he became still more deeply absorbed in the melancholy contemplation.

The day of the interment, I stood at the window to see the funeral *cortège* pass. The court was full of peasants, who had assembled from the neighbouring village. They all loved the Marchioness and her son. The procession was long ; and I watched it wind along the narrow path, descending the hill. At last it disappeared, and all was again silent, and I wept. I now, for the first time, understood death—that crowning bitterness of all.

On returning from the cemetery, the Marquis did not re-enter the castle with his friends and servants. He took a path which led to the forest. The day was glorious. A light breeze tempered the heat of the sun, whose rays played amongst the thick trees, and imparted a brighter colour to the red rocks that overhung the road. No cloud obscured the sky, no sound was heard in this solitude. The Marquis walked, he cared not whither, without

looking around him. What was all this joyous nature to him? Such a short time had sufficed to shew him his son dying, dead, and buried, that he had yet scarcely realised it.

He advanced to the end of the wood, from whence was a lovely view. At the foot of the grassy mountain lay a fair valley; pure streams descended from all sides to water them, and then, uniting at some distance off, they murmured over a pebbly bed, till, at a still greater distance, they became a roaring cataract. Rocks of immense elevation formed the boundary of this charming picture. Lower down, the towers of Vieilcastel rose, half covered with ivy, and half concealed by the variegated foliage of the large trees.

M. de Vaudreuil recognised the spot as one where he had been the preceding autumn with Roger. He sat down on the turf, and inexpressible sadness spread over him, as he thought of the pleasures he had himself poisoned when he possessed them. Alas! the power even to do this was now taken from him. Another than he was now charged to mix the poison in his cup, and he must drink it. A torrent of tears at last escaped from his eyes. They were the first he had shed since his great loss. They relieved his throbbing head, but not his agonised heart. It was to him as if a hand of iron—a merciless hand—was laid upon his breast, delighting to keep him in the dust. He longed for his son. How often had he soothed himself with the thought that perhaps when this sweet, though feeble child should have acquired strength and power, he would find the solutions for which he had vainly sought himself! The future for him had

been his son. Alas ! what days of misery he anticipated now ! Nothing but mourning, added to doubt and despair.

A young shepherd passed just then. He was taking some goats to the top of the mountain. His sister, younger than he, was trying to follow him, by taking hold of the slender herbs, to help her uncertain steps. At the sight of the Marquis, the children stopped on a rock and looked at him with dismay. The little girl came close up to her brother.

"Do not be afraid," said the boy, "it is the father of Master Roger, who gave thee the cake when thou went to Vieilcastel ; he will give thee no more now."

"Why not ?"

"Because he is dead."

"Tell me, Francois, what does *dead* mean ?"

"Be quiet, little one ; it means that he is put under ground."

"Under ground ?"

"To be sure, and if thee don't mind, they'll put thee there too."

The little girl began to cry.

"Yes," said the boy, raising his voice, and opening his eyes wide, as if to embolden himself by frightening one younger ; "they digged a hole, and put Master Roger in, and now he is done with for ever. He will never come out again ; he will grow like the dust."

"Oh !" said the little girl, trembling, "how wicked ! Why have they done that ?"

The boy began to laugh, making game of the child's ignorance.

"Thou art too young to understand," he said at last ; "let us go—don't cry. Come, mount after me, and let us look for some strawberries in the wood."

The Marquis had turned his head at the sound of childish voices. He followed the little shepherds with his eyes. Their words pained him. When they had disappeared, he rose quickly, and took the path to Vieilcastel. Death, under its most material form, was frightful to his thoughts. It was not, however, under this form that he had regarded it at first. The peaceful end of the little Roger, the tender words he had spoken, and the angelic expression of his lovely countenance, which had remained until the coffin was closed, had touched his heart deeply ; but he had seen nothing repulsive. It was the easy passage of a soul from earth to heaven. But after what he had just heard, he no longer pondered on those tender scenes ; his imagination haunted that place of the grave where his child's body had been deposited. He thought he saw that charming head lose its freshness and beauty, fade away, crumble, and become hideous and frightful. A few bones, a little dust, was all that would remain of that creature so charming, so beautiful, so loving, and so beloved !

Arrived near Vieilcastel, M. de Vaudreuil felt an irresistible desire to return to the cemetery where his son reposed. It was situated above the village, on a little hill at the foot of the mountain. A deep ravine separated it from the castle. A steep path soon conducted the Marquis to the newly-made grave. The place was deserted ; the dead seemed abandoned to their gloomy abode, and the sun, playing over the tombs, seemed to laugh at those who could no more see his light, and to deck out with

pomp that nature of which the cold grave had robbed them. It was a glorious afternoon ; but they who would have enjoyed it, slept under the stones. M. de Vaudreuil stopped at the hedge, which served as enclosure to the cemetery. This city of silent, motionless beings, made him tremble. He feared to disturb the repose of those who had, perhaps, like himself, lived agitated lives, without any conducting clue,—any certain end. The sound of the torrent deadened his ears. To his imagination, it seemed like the heavy groaning of the dead, murmuring in the abyss, at the steady progress of their destruction. He threw himself on the mound under which his child slept, and lay there, so absorbed in one thought, that existence seemed for a while suspended ; his eye longed to pierce the mystery of the tomb, to contemplate once more those cherished remains ; but the grave was closed for ever.

What frightful thoughts were his ! Death ! death ! Why are we born, if we must die ? Why live ? Day after day, minute after minute, this being without a name—destiny, chance, or perhaps God—forces us to lead a bitter, insupportable life, invaded by evil in all its forms. And why ?—for what end ? For a humiliating destruction. His son was already a victim to this cruel law—he himself would be some day. Oh ! he felt in his heart, not revolt only, but hatred, deep hatred, against the immutable principle of the universe. His own utter weakness, opposed to this irresistible power, irritated him violently, and his grief increased with his murmurs.

After having thus, for a long time, cursed life and death, in this place, which might have taught him other and

better things, he heard the sound of a carriage ; and fearing to be disturbed by some indiscreet eye, he returned to the castle. Madame de Vaudreuil was anxiously looking for him. They passed the rest of the day together in gloomy sorrow, varied only by bursts of grief. This common bereavement drew them nearer to one another ; they felt they needed one another. And yet what a difference in their grief !

M. de Vaudreuil's occupations had lost all their charms for him. If he ever opened a book or a pamphlet of the day, it was with an air of distraction. These things were of no interest to him now—they were not powerful enough to soothe his sorrow—it was of no use to attempt to do this. The hours of each day passed in the same manner, and he had ceased to reckon them. Sometimes, he would wander alone, not knowing whither—sometimes with his wife, speaking little, but thinking much, he would give way entirely to the gloomy feelings his thoughts suggested. Thus the weeks passed, without variation,—without relief.

One evening, M. and Madame de Vaudreuil were sitting out of doors. The moon riding in the cloudless sky bathed with silver rays the black stones of the old towers, and the dark ivy that covered the turrets—it was like a severe countenance relaxing into a smile. This peaceful light, broken by the great shadows of the walls, gave to everything around a fantastic appearance, well calculated to draw the mind from the world of reality, and transport it to that of dreams. At such times, we feel elevated—raised above ourselves by some invisible hand—and if one's own inspirations fail, those of the poetry of nature are easily

brought to mind. Notwithstanding her sorrow, the Marchioness was accessible to these impressions, and entertained them. But it was not the same with her husband ; and although these night scenes are less sad to contemplate than the glorious splendour of day, because they are not in such strong contrast with the gloom of our hearts, he could not yield to their sweet influence, but, absorbed in himself, he remained under the weight of his habitual reveries.

"Let us go in," he said, at last ; "the evening is fresh, and you may take cold."

"No," said the Marchioness, "it does me so much good ; let us stay."

M. de Vaudreuil went for a shawl, which he put over his wife's shoulders, and then sat down beside her.

"Do you not enjoy," said she, "the contemplation of melancholy beauty which the star of night sheds over our mountains ? Look, now, towards the cemetery ; see how the cypresses are clothed in silver, and the tombstones shine in the darkness !"

"The moon does not fear," said he, "to sully her rays by shining on such decay !"

"God can raise all ruins,—even yours, Victor."

"Why should He raise them ? Why should He, who permits evil, bid it cease ? Nothing authorises us to hope for it. The past is evil—the present is so also—why should not the future be the same ? Where is there any pledge of change ? I see it nowhere ; and you only see it in the warmth of your desires."

"No, my friend !" said the Marchioness, "it is not blind instinct that inspires me with the conviction, that in the end all is for our good. Experience confirms me in it.

Those very sufferings which have so worn out my life, I have accepted, because they increase its value,—because they are the necessary condition of the affections. I have felt that they also are a gift from God,—a means put into my hands of rising above the earth. My past life reassures me.”

“ Ah ! how does my past life console me ? ” cried M. de Vaudreuil ; “ agony, doubt, and affliction. I say with you, experience answers for the future. But, oh, my beloved ! why has the trouble of my heart contaminated yours, and poisoned even your sorrows ? ”

“ Victor, my ambition has been to suffer with you always, although poor human love can bring neither ease nor cure.”

The Marquis appeared touched by his wife’s words ; he drew her arm through his, and they walked towards the castle.

“ If,” said she, “ I could only transfer from my heart to yours some consolation ”——

“ Consolation for me ! ” said he, “ do not speak of it ; I shall never be consoled. Life, destiny, I shall owe nothing to them. I will suffer, that I may accuse as I will, fate, chance, and existence. Who can forbid me to curse them ? What have they given me ? Ah ! my beloved, it is a terrible thing to lose one’s son, but more terrible still are the thoughts this loss recalls from the depths whither I had hoped they were banished for ever.”

M. de Vaudreuil smiled as he said these words, such a smile as one dislikes to see on a passionate countenance—the indication of struggle between contending feelings or tumultuous thoughts at variance with one another. The

eyes of his wife were suffused with tears. She saw in her husband only irritable weakness, engaged in powerless revolt, but no courage to resist. She did not reply, knowing that her husband's feelings only gained fresh bitterness by expression. Compared with his, her own sufferings were almost happiness.

Roger's death would have been enough to grieve sorely a soul whose affections were so deeply rooted. Such a loss, falling on a man of calm mind, would have overcome him, and broken his spirit for long. But the Marquis, when the blow fell on him, was all ready for the tempest. The sentiments which he had smothered, the ideas which he had put away by such varied and persevering means, again rose up within him ; for they only waited for a fresh opportunity to break forth. Now one chord had been touched, and all the others vibrated. It was no longer a restless spirit, grappling with difficulties, but a heart in anguish, longing for an answer which it did not hope to find. Oh ! if he could only have concentrated all his regret in the loss of his son, have remembered the past, and constantly mourned for it, without seeking to understand, or wishing to raise the veil of the future ! If he could have done so, he would, perhaps, have found his loss a blessing, and it would then have served him as a rampart against his thoughts. But it was not so. In the death of his son, he had himself watched death closely, and had tried to sound the depth of that greatest of all mysteries ; death, that is to say, man face to face with the unknown ; man, passive instead of active ; death, that is to say, perhaps God, perhaps nothing, the end of life, or its beginning, the destruction, or the sovereignty of evil.

Who could tell him ? There was a time when he groaned over human ignorance ; now he was angry with it.

This disposition increased upon him every day, and there was nothing to counteract it. He had renounced all serious reading. He was not calm enough, or rather, dejected enough (for dejection was his only calmness), to occupy himself with study ; and, besides, had he not searched, examined, and sounded all things ?

But had he really done so ? Amidst all his researches, had he not neglected the most necessary ? With all his knowledge, was not the most elementary still wanting ? The dearest, the nearest object, was it not veiled from him by singular delusions ? And was not this pride, which made him soar above all these things, and look down upon them, because they did not serve his purpose, the first of all his errors ? Oh ! what sad discoveries were reserved for him in the future ! How strangely deceived was this man, who thought himself past all deception ! What unknown sorrows awaited him !

CHAPTER V.

ONE beautiful day in summer, I went with M. and Madame de Vaudreuil to pay a visit at Ermont. I was struck as we went with the Marchioness's appearance. She had been so constantly occupied with the sorrows of another, as well as her own, that her strength was failing. Certainly it is not in its first hour that suffering is most to be dreaded. In fact, it seems then to communicate strength to the soul, and the storm it raises shakes the heart too much for us to observe all its effects. It is afterwards that we need to fear it most, when apparently it has retired, but in reality only more surely to undermine its victim. Then, indeed, we become its certain prey, and have only to count its ravages, and to measure the ruins left behind.

M. de Vaudreuil, on his arrival at Ermont, began to talk with Maurice. He spoke with great vivacity. There was something discordant between the brilliant flow of his language and his gloomy disposition which took its colour from the secret agony of his mind. The want of equilibrium within threw him into a thousand excesses, and, although sincere, he often expressed himself in a manner not conformable to his true meaning, which, however, was made clear by the pleasure he took in marking

the contrast, not for others, but for himself. His look belied his words. There was something so sad in the sight of this man, who, without power or wish to calm his sorrow, played with it, and thus gave it almost absolute power over himself.

Whilst M. de Vaudreuil conversed with Maurice, the Marchioness was watching what took place in the next room, the doors of which were open. A young lady was sitting there, surrounded by her children; an old man was looking with an eye of pleasure on the two generations, whilst a younger one, the son, or the son-in-law of the old man, was playing with a little boy with light hair and cheeks radiant with health and pleasure. How could she bear all this happiness? she, who was tasting at the same time all the joys of daughter, wife, and mother? Madame de Vaudreuil felt almost faint at the sight of such great happiness; and, although she remembered having seen the young lady some years before, she could not make up her mind to address her.

Suddenly the little boy broke from the group, and ran into the room where we were. His mother came to fetch him back, and then seeing the Marchioness, recognised her, and led up to her a train of merry children, seating herself beside her, and speaking freely of all the tender feelings of her heart. Madame de Vaudreuil listened to her with emotion; but the contrast was too great for her, on that day particularly. Her heart refused to enjoy the felicity of others, though she struggled against her own sorrow. The stranger had not remarked the air of deep dejection which the poor mother bore. She went on speaking of her own children, and bringing them forward to be ad-

mired. The Marchioness took them in her arms, caressed them sadly, and said : " May God preserve them to you ;" then she put them gently from her.

We left early, for the way was long, and the evening promised to be cold. It was already dusk, and the horses went slowly along that mountainous road. Lulled by the easy motion of the carriage, I gave way to such dreamy thoughts as are suggested by the twilight. M. de Vaudreuil had again become gloomy, and we were all silent.

" I fear, Jeanne," the Marquis said at last to his wife, " I fear the day has been very fatiguing for you."

" No," she replied with vivacity that seemed to have been restrained, only to burst out with fresh force ; " but this visit has been trying to me, cruelly trying. Oh, my son ! why have I lost thee ? why has my life become dull and drear ?"

She continued for some time to give vent to expressions such as these, and half-finished sentences ; then, after a few minutes silence, she yielded to fresh bursts of grief. It was easy to see she was making great efforts to repress her emotion. Murmurings had sprung up in the heart ; she had long refused to give them place, but now, after so many days past in fears, she had no strength for resistance. As she spoke, each time she would have recalled her words, but her agitation would not permit her.

M. de Vaudreuil had never seen his wife in this state before, and had not thought her capable of such bursts of feeling. He had been so accustomed to see her suffer with serenity, hiding her grief, instead of displaying it, that this triumph of sorrow over resignation and unself-

ishness frightened him. He knew not what means to adopt to sooth her.

"Speak to her," he said to me in a low voice, "speak to her, I beseech you ; you know the words that will do her good."

I could not reply. I wept without being able to do any good. M. de Vaudreuil saw that he could not reckon on me, and must depend on himself alone. A difficult task was his ! To become consoler ! He, who was not able to sooth one of the least of his own troubles ! He tried not to divert her, nor did he make use of any of those common-place words of comfort about courage, destiny, the irremediable, which console only those who have no need of consolation. Experience had taught him the nullity of all these.

Madame de Vaudreuil had sunk back in the carriage, and was weeping ; but her tears brought her no relief. The struggle within was violent, and her exclamations proclaimed it. After a moment's hesitation, the Marquis recollected himself, and then leaning towards his wife with all that tenderness with which she alone could inspire him :—

"Jeanne," said he, "is it for you to give way to such excess ? You who have the strongest cause for consolation ? We may expect these violent transports of grief from those who have no hope ; but you, oh, my beloved ! think of the happiness of our child, of that Divine will to which you love so much to submit !"

"Ah ! Victor," she murmured, feebly seizing her husband's hand, "you have spoken to me the words I want."

"Yes, I knew it was so. Have you not often told me

that every pain you feel is a new proof of God's love to you? The thought is dear to you, that is sufficient."

He was silent, for he felt these words must sound strange from his lips, and he could say no more. But more was not wanted. Madame de Vaudreuil had regained those higher regions where her spirit was most accustomed to dwell, and her grief had resumed its peaceful course. The drive was finished in silence. I observed that, as we descended from the carriage, the Marquis looked very grave. Doubtless he was happy to have consoled his wife, but he had used language that was not his own. Could he then draw near to her only by ceasing to be himself?

On entering his study, M. de Vaudreuil sat down at a table, and supporting his head on his hands, sought to unravel what was passing within him. But this was not easy. His thoughts wandered, and, much dejected, he remembered what he had just witnessed almost with envy, as he compared it with the feelings of bitterness and acrimony which had so long distracted his own mind. Hatred and pride could alone enable him to support unflinchingly a grief for which he did not even seek consolation. He had no new ground for hope; and yet others, he reflected, had found rest, and he too must have rest; yet his intellect failed to point out the way to it. What a contradiction! yet a natural one. Whence came that imperious instinct, if not from the deep-rooted misery of his heart? Thirsting after happiness like all men, thirsting after goodness like some, he saw nothing in himself but an unfathomable abyss; beyond himself ah! he dared not look on that frightful mystery.

Knowledge ! what was knowledge to him ? His intellect was content to be silent. His heart alone needed satisfaction, an object for his love, for his sacrifices. He wished for peace, to possess rather than to know, to live, instead of thus for ever struggling. The thinker had given place to the man ; would the man be happier than the thinker had been ? would he succeed better ? or would disappointment, that milder form of despair, be always the result of bootless efforts, and vain wishes ?

· Whilst these reflections were passing rapidly through his mind, he perceived on a shelf the large Bible with pictures, of which Roger had been so fond. There it was, neglected, covered thickly with dust, for the hand of the child could no more wipe it away. The sight of it affected M. de Vaudreuil. He opened it mechanically, and turned over some leaves at hazard ; it was a remembrance of his son that he sought there. He found many others besides ; he rose, took a few turns along the room, and approached the window. A light shone from another part of the castle. It came from the Marchioness's apartment, and was so placed that what passed within could be seen from without. Madame de Vaudreuil was on her knees at her prie-Dieu ; her hands were joined, and her countenance, though bearing traces of deep emotion, was peaceful, and expressed resignation. Her husband looked at her, and was deeply affected ; he did not leave the window until she moved away. He then went back to his seat with a pensive air. How beautiful and touching it was to see her pray ! How prayer elevated and calmed her soul ! Why should he not pray also ? Pray ? pray to whom ? Did he know ? had he a God ? And besides, what should

he say ? Should he ask why he was created ? Should he reproach his Creator for his sufferings ? Should he humble himself before an unknown Being ? Oh ! no, certainly not. This idea passed like lightning through his mind ; he rallied himself for having conceived it, and put away the book.

But to put away his thoughts was not so easy. The image of his wife floated before his eyes. Error, error alone, could not produce such happy results. Should he try that path, and do as Madame de Vaudreuil did, voluntarily shut his eyes ? should he not at least attempt it ? He took up Roger's book again, and opened it in one of the gospels. The perusal, begun at hazard, by degrees captivated him. He had often read it before in a spirit of criticism, and now at first he was assailed by a crowd of hostile arguments, but he drove them away, for they suited not the wants of his heart. His intellect was no longer curious, but his heart was famished. He read a long time, and was insensibly penetrated by an impression quite strange to him ; and although he was far from understanding all that the sacred history contained, he felt that there was a connection between it and his wife's frame of mind. It was like a ladder which reached from earth to heaven. Man was there in contact with God. An underlined passage attracted M. de Vaudreuil's attention ; it was this : " My God ! my God ! why hast Thou forsaken me ? " At this place, between the leaves, was a paper written in the Marchioness's hand-writing. He opened it, and found the following :

" ' My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me ? ' O my Saviour, how changed is all around for Thee, since the day, when, on Mount Tabor, the glory of Thy Father

descended upon Thee ! There was a time, when leaving the crowd whom Thou hadst fed and taught, Thou didst retire to pray. Close communion with Thy God gave Thee new strength for Thy difficult mission. The sins of earth did not as yet oppress Thee with all their heavy weight, since by Thy prayers Thou wast in close intercourse with heaven. In the garden of Olives, Thou didst feel the approach of death, and knew beforehand all its agony. The hand of God was heavy upon Thee, yet Thou wast not entirely abandoned. '*My Father,*' Thou didst say, 'let this cup pass from Me.' But this cup did not pass from Thee. Betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, abandoned by all, a prey to the insults of the multitude, Thou wast dragged before the tribunal. A senseless people demanded Thy death, an iniquitous judge condemned Thee to it, and soldiers accomplished it. Already Thou art on the cross, and they who believed in Thee have no longer any hope. But even now Thou raisest Thy voice with confidence : 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' The hours pass, and for a long time Thy sacred lips utter but few words. At last in Thy agony Thou criest, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me ?' Alas ! my Saviour, did Thy long meditation lead Thee to this, while we thought heavenly strength supported Thee ? and while, for the dying Christian, the last hours are the most glorious, and while, as he is drawn from earth, heaven becomes more visible to his straining eyes, and his lips give testimony of more assurance, and more love, Thou, our pattern, our example, at Thine awful hour wast sinking deeper and deeper into the fathomless pit of sorrow and despair, with

no succour from thy Father. Forgive me that my mind is perplexed with this mystery, which is too great for it. But, O my God, my heart understands it, and in the day of distress, it is here that I find consolation. Thou hast Thyself pronounced these terrible words, which before Thy coming, every man could pronounce for himself. Thou hast extracted all their bitterness, and we remember them only as a token of Thy love. Henceforth no man has a right to pronounce them on his own account. Oh, Thou that reconcilest God and man, vouchsafe to make this known to those who forsake Thee, and are in despair, because they think Thou hast forsaken them. Thou Saviour who art come to bring us nearer to God, open their eyes, touch their hearts, and grant that my waiting expectation, O God, may not be in vain !”

As he finished these lines, M. de Vaudreuil was seized with one of those fits of vague emotion which bring no definite ideas, and which sometimes assail the mind when exhausted by thought. He admired more than ever his wife's power of soaring heavenwards. Might not his sufferings arise from not having sought communion with God ? He had worked much with his intellect ; but even supposing he had found truth, would his heart have been at peace ? No, for this union with God is necessary, and in this close union forgetfulness of all his own peculiar troubles and agitations. M. de Vaudreuil did not at that moment think of all the powerful reasons that had urged him on to despair. How, he used to think, can I approach a God who has so long abandoned me to grief and evil ? The warmth of desire, he had often said, is the only motive of hope. But it did not suit him just now

to remember these words. He feared lest much reasoning should disturb an impression which he would gladly retain, because it gave a little repose to his heart. To unite himself with God ! Mysterious and incomprehensible thought, but fraught with ineffable sweetness ! A true but incomplete idea ! To unite himself with God ! but by what right ? he, a rebel, haughty, and full of himself, and proud of his own nothingness !

O my God ! the way is so simple, the remedy so close ! The cup is raised to the lips, but the lips are closed. This salutary cup has a bitter edge ; we fear it. We fear to be lowered ever so little, even though afterwards we should rise much higher. Well ! be it so ; let the rebel go still further in rebellion, the wanderer still further in the wild, if only at last he come safely home !

CHAPTER VI.

MADAME DE VAUDREUIL'S strong nature, so constantly restrained within the limits of the most exquisite moderation, needed relief and expansion at times ; she felt she must exceed her bounds in something, and she did so in her devotion to others. I could never say all that she was for M. de Lussac and for myself, even in the time of her greatest grief. Her goodness flowed so easily, and was never wearied, and it never appeared any effort to her. To give herself to others seemed the natural object of her existence. She had now, by degrees, become so accustomed to her sorrow, that she bore it without a struggle, and without agitation. It was the burden to be borne all her life ; she tried to bear it easily.

One morning she was walking with my guardian in the grounds :

"Do you think, my dear uncle," she said, "that after having exhausted and rejected all ideas, it is possible to exhaust all feeling, and so to arrive at a state of indifference ?"

"What do you mean, my child ?"

"I fear that Victor may have arrived at this state."

"You deceive yourself," said M. de Lussac ; "I conversed

a long time with him yesterday, and have never been so much satisfied with his conversation.”

The Marchioness directed an enquiring look to my guardian, but in reality she did not place much confidence in what he had just said.

“I was sitting in the shade, on my favourite bank,” resumed the old man, “when Victor came by, and sat down beside me. ‘We both admire nature,’ he said to me. ‘We delight to feel in intimate communion with the Deity, to live in His life, to be absorbed in Him. The sorrows of life are soothed by this union.’ I expressed pleasure in finding him in such a happy mood. ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘I do feel happy; there is nothing like religion to calm the soul, and make life supportable. I confess,’ added he, ‘I have been long unjust towards you; I know now that what we pursue by different roads, is in reality the same thing: harmony with the Divine principle. Let us be tolerant to one another!’ He went on talking to me in this strain, which he would not have done a few weeks back.”

“No,” replied the Marchioness; “but I have often heard him talk in this way lately, and it does not give me pleasure. There is no strength in vacuity. This is the way to deaden all feeling, as scepticism does all thought. Look, dear uncle, there are only two ways of escaping agitation; either the desires and wants of the mind must find satisfaction in religion, or they must be destroyed. The interval between either consummation is the region of tempests. I could not be glad to see Victor take one step further on the road that ends in desolation.”

"But, is it not rather one step towards religion?"

"I cannot believe it, uncle. Instead of throwing a bridge over the abyss, Victor draws a veil between himself and God. In this manner he will never unite himself with God; and when he perceives the inutility of his efforts, his soul being too much exhausted to despair, he will become indifferent."

These anticipations were sad. There is nothing so grievous as to see a beloved being divesting himself, one by one, of all his endowments! And yet what is more frequent? In how many men we see the wreck of brilliant faculties! The ashes on the hearth are still warm, but where is the flame? How many intellects, bright and adventurous at first setting out, have gradually yielded to miserable calculations and paltry ambition, because their possessors preferred to let them perish, rather than follow their generous impulses! How many warm and passionate hearts have by degrees grown cold, and yielded to self-admiration, to boundless pride, for the sole reason, that, finding no repose, they wearied their possessors! How many good and generous instincts have been smothered, because they were too good to be convenient. O God! is it for this that Thou hast so richly endowed Thy creatures?

Madame de Vaudreuil was right not to rejoice. The time of system had passed for her husband; he had arrived at that of experience. Weary of seeking by his reason, he searched now by his heart, or by his imagination, perhaps, as if one part of man could be satisfied at the expense of another! as if all the faculties were not dependent, profiting equally by what profits one! To

draw near again to God, would have implied a previous separation of which his pride would not admit ; but to be absorbed in God, to lose himself in Him, did not partake of that humiliating character. Thus he saw God in everything, and especially adored Him in himself. Nothing in reality could be further removed from M. de Vaudreuil's character than this tendency. As his mind required precision, so his heart naturally inclined towards distinct and strong feelings. That faintness of the soul, which is one of the failings of our age, had always inspired him with repugnance ; but to what has not sorrow recourse ? We have such great need of religion, that if we possess it not, we adorn with its name any sort of feeling, sometimes even its very opposite. Surely in no time, have the power of misconstruction, and the gifts of equivocation, been carried to such extreme as in our own.

M. de Vaudreuil had always admired nature, although the contemplation of it had brought him more sadness than pleasure. Now it became an object of enthusiasm with him, almost of adoration. It was not as the work of God, reflecting Divine power, it was the form of Divinity itself. The mysterious words we hear in the storm or in the calm lull of nature, he thought proceeded from his own heart, as his own sighs were confounded in his mind with the throes of the universe. This life was, in fact, made up of sensations which sought a more exalted name by appealing to the soul. Instead of striving after goodness, men only seek to be exalted. They wish to attain to the infinite, and, failing to embrace it in their grasp, they prefer to be annihilated. Their vices or their failings alone acquire colossal proportions, and over their

forfeited individuality reigns inordinate pride. M. de Vaudreuil had come to this. Was he in a better state than before ?

One splendid day in August, as I was returning with my guardian from a long ramble in the woods, I perceived M. and Madame de Vaudreuil in the carriage on the road leading to Vieilcastel. The carriage stopped, and a kind voice invited us to get in. M. de Lussac assented with pleasure, and soon we were all rolling rapidly towards the castle.

I saw at the first glance that all was not right between the husband and wife. The eyes of the Marchioness were swollen, as if she had been restraining her tears through pride or prudence. M. de Vaudreuil looked first at his wife, then at the landscape, with an air of supreme indifference. She asked me some questions about our excursion, to which I replied gaily and cheerfully.

"Yes," said the Marquis, "these *tête-à-tête* excursions are most charming."

The Marchioness leaned back in the carriage, and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"The dust is insupportable to-day," she said.

"There is none at all to-day," said her husband, looking at her intently.

He was right ; but I did not like him for his remark. I know not what observations might have followed, had we not happily arrived at Vieilcastel.

The evening passed most unpleasantly. It rained, and we could not go out. My guardian went to sleep, and I was intending to go to my room, that I might be no obstacle in the way of an explanation, when the Marchioness bade me remain. She appeared to fear, above all

things, being left alone with her husband. What had passed between them ?

While driving out with his wife, M. de Vaudreuil had been in a mood of perfect self-complacency. His reflections had led him to adore the Deity in himself, and the idea of his own virtue had appeared to him so clear and bright, that he bore its reflex on his countenance. He was proud of mankind, not only of himself ; and a failing in any one of his fellow-creatures, he would have felt as a blot on himself. Thus he was disposed to see in others, instead of errors, only the result of different phases, different points of view ; instead of vices, only the imperfections of a soul which had not accomplished its evolutions. On this ground of dazzling whiteness, his own merits were drawn in pure and brilliant lines. The emotion which is inspired by the beautiful, sprang up within him, from his self-contemplation ; and the magnificence of the surrounding country increased his serenity, by offering him, for so he thought, a perfect image of his own moral excellence.

After having been long lost in thought :—

“ How great,” said he, “ is the influence that the phases of our inward life exercise over the affections ! It seems to me that the heart ought to be exempt from the storms which agitate the other regions ! ”

“ In that case,” said the Marchioness, “ the affections must be very superficial, or confined within a stated boundary. But when they pervade the whole soul, when they participate in all the smallest details of life, they must be subject to the same transformations.”

“ We have experienced this to our cost,” replied the marquis. “ Let it be now for our happiness ! Let our

souls be united afresh in adoration ! There is no true happiness but in the union of two minds, a union in which the individuality of both shall be lost. My religious instincts have been developed lately : what can now oppose the perfect union of our souls with one another, and with God ? ”

M. de Vaudreuil spoke with warmth and sincerity—at least if we can call by that name the eagerness with which a man tries to draw another to his opinion, hoping, by so doing, to strengthen himself in it.

“ Every cause of discord has ceased between us,” he continued with increasing animation. “ What signify different names for things, or secondary forms ? Our tendencies, our aspirations, our desires, are they not the same ? To live a divine life ? Your mind is naturally inclined to this. God is in you ; God is in me ; together are we not one divine being ? ”

“ Human,” replied the Marchioness, with a slightly ironical smile.

“ Human or divine, why, what does it matter ? The finite and the infinite meet, are confounded and absorbed in one another. Let us beware of those fatal distinctions which dry up the heart, and lay waste the intellect. All is great and worthy of our admiration. O my beloved ! let us drink at these rapturous streams of the Infinite and the Eternal. Let us endeavour to understand the world ; and, since individual life, taken in itself, offers to us nothing but sorrow, let us not dwell on it, but consider the universal life which circulates in nature. Let us see God in all things around us, God always, God everywhere.”

Madame de Vaudreuil was not much pleased with these

words of her husband's. She discerned through them a fictitious character which could not satisfy her. This sort of cold enthusiasm and pomp of sentiment embarrassed her ; she saw its hollowness. A return to religious sentiments by such a path could not be desirable. She replied in general terms to her husband ; then, to give the conversation a more homely turn, she leaned forward and directed his attention to some remarkable site. He did not even turn his eyes in the direction indicated by the Marchioness's hand, but in a dry voice said :—

“ It does not suit you, then, to converse with me.”

She trembled as she heard him speak, but turned gently to him ; the storm she had endeavoured to avert was about to burst over her. She knew her husband too well, not to be aware of the unusual efforts he must have made to attain to a state of mind so unnatural to him. His feelings were now so strained that the least opposition would produce irritation. He was not willing that any one should see how artificial was the state of exaltation to which he had contrived to bring himself.

“ What are your motives,” said he, “ for evading the subjects on which I like to speak to you ? ”

“ It is true,” she replied, with great sweetness, “ that I would rather not have tried so lofty a flight. I cannot command enthusiasm. When you strike out into a new path, you cannot suffer people to go at a different pace to your own. I confess I find it difficult to follow you into those misty regions where there is no beaten track. My feelings are too strong to be undecided ; yours are so likewise, as you know, of course ; but you would hardly like me to appeal from you in the clouds, to you in the ordinary path of life.”

"Certainly not ; I do not like to find you on the defensive, when I come to you with my heart full of religion, tenderness and sympathy. I have been many times deceived in my life ; at one time agitation was the only shape my feelings could assume ; and now when I have conceived a dream, a last dream, that of uniting myself to God and to men, to you, Jeanne ; when I would bathe in an ocean of love, there drown my thoughts, my sorrows, and my wounded soul, it is you who blow coldly on this dream. You oppose your calmness to my eagerness, a cold smile to my tenderness ; and when I am possessed by some passionate inspiration, not prompted by reason or by system, then you repel me by I know not what narrow restrictions. Is this the result of your faith ? I remember well the warm and sensitive heart with which you were once endowed ; what have you done with it ? What have you done with my treasure ?"

"O, Victor," she said with ill-repressed emotion, "how is it that you so misunderstand me ? Little do you know a heart that is devoted to you. From what words of mine do you gather repugnance to a life of closer union with you ? In which of my most trifling actions an appearance of coldness ? God knows that the passionate desire of my heart for years has been that our aspirations should be the same. But I wish them to be the same in reality, not merely in appearance ; and since my forbearance only awakes your suspicions, and excites your reproaches, I shall tell you all, Victor, all that I feel, all that I fear, all that I long for."

She looked at her husband with that imploring air which betokens the height of affection in a lofty soul.

M. de Vaudreuil's state of feeling was laboured and artificial, and he felt both disconcerted and wounded in his pride ; his own impressions were so loose, that he no longer possessed strength of mind sufficient to be tolerant with others. He would not observe this mute appeal to his affections. He crossed his arms, and throwing himself back in the carriage :

"I am listening," he said.

Nothing hardens the heart more than religion which does not commence in its voluntary humiliation. She hesitated a moment, but there was no way of retreating, and she resumed timidly, like one who dreads excessively the wound to which he exposes himself.

"Forgive me," she said, "for not entering with sufficient warmth into the statements you express. I am uneasy, and your words have increased my alarm. For some time I have seen you in a frame of mind that has made me anxious. You deceive yourself, Victor, and despair, it may be irremediable despair, will be the only result of your vain efforts. You wish to unite yourself with God, and you are right. There is nothing so great, or so worthy of the human mind ; I will say more, it is the very end for which existence is given us. But, my beloved, it seems to me that by some fatal error, when you would draw near to God, you mistake at once both God and man. When you profess to lose yourself in God, you merely throw aside your own individuality, or rather you assume sacred names which belong only to one greater than you. To devote yourself to any one, you must remain your own distinct self, distinct from him to whom you give yourself. This is true of earthly affec-

tions ; the union of two hearts does not give rise to one single monotonous sound, but to harmonious accord. Ah ! Victor, forgive these words, which spring from my deep love to you. I have been afraid that you should succeed, and that some day my heart, when seeking yours, should find it cold and quenched, and in your exhausted soul, instead of the passion which gives life, there should be only the void which kills."

M. de Vaudreuil had shown great impatience whilst his wife was speaking. Although the last words of the Marchioness expressed a fear that her husband might lose his sensitiveness, her accent and tone of voice were those of one who deplored a fact already accomplished. After having gloried in his intellect, even when it was powerless, the Marquis now gloried in his feelings without perceiving that they proceeded far more from his imagination than from his heart. He could not bear words that seemed to attack his dignity.

"I see," he said, "it suits you best to live alone in heart, as well as in thought."

"Ah ! don't think so ; I have too much enjoyed the sweetness of close communion with you, Victor, and with that angel who awaits us in heaven, not to feel every moment almost insupportable that passes without an echo to my most cherished thoughts, to my dearest impressions. The years that have passed since we last worshipped God together, have not passed smoothly or lightly with me ; but I never even felt your heart beat. I knew it lived, and in confidence I waited for the day when, once more at peace, it would beat again in unison with my own. Instead of this, it is threatened with utter helplessness.

By trying to embrace all, you let all escape you, and vain shadows alone people your desert soul."

"So you speak to me of insensibility?" cried the Marquis. "I speak to you of love, of religion, and you predict for me the death of the soul; you have no authority for this."

"Should I have spoken of it," she asked, "if you had not forced me from my silence?"

"I know not, but you are always glad of occasions to raise fresh barriers between us."

"Ah! Victor, I have a thousand and a thousand times blessed God, that, in the absence of that union of inclinations which raises happiness into enthusiasm, there was in you and in me, at least a real and deep moral life. We felt this in common, even amid our differences. How many beings there are living side by side, without seeking such a union as this, without even any idea of its possibility! Heaven is my witness"——

"There is no need to call heaven to witness," interrupted the Marquis, "that henceforth there must be a wider separation between us. You shall not be the only one to desire it. Such scenes of reproach as to-day's cannot suit me, and I will avoid them. I will live in my own thoughts, and our intercourse shall be such as shall run no risk of wounding or receiving wounds."

She bent her head, for she could not bear the cold look that was fixed upon her. Her heart beat violently, but she had no words. A long silence ensued; at last she said:

"Victor, you want but one thing, only one thing, the consciousness of evil. If you had this, how far would you

be from finding all things perfect and divine ! At the sight of so much corruption in us and around us, what need of separation, what love for the Reconciler would spring up in your heart !”

“ You seem fond of grand words.”

“ Well,” said she, “ let us forget this conversation ; I have been wrong, perhaps ; I ought not to have looked into your heart ; let us come back to subjects on which we agree.”

“ There was no reason ever to leave them.”

M. de Vaudreuil's countenance was pale, and his lips trembled with passion. Madame de Vaudreuil had never seen him thus before ; she was much concerned, and turning to him her beautiful face full of sorrow, she would have laid her hand on that of her husband, but he abruptly drew his away, saying :—

“ After our new conditions, that would be too intimate. It is now my turn to raise barriers.”

Was she wrong in saying his new sentiments would end in insensibility ? They were that already, only in its poetic form. She covered her face with her hands ; the future appeared to her like a phantom, and great fear took possession of her. She, however, kept calm. Perhaps the Marquis's passion was only momentary. The hard words he had spoken perhaps escaped him in his anger ; she hoped it was so. She knew how deeply she had wounded her husband, not in his affections, for she had spoken tenderly, but in his pride, for she had felt no enthusiasm when he spoke. The high estimation in which he held himself, did not seem to meet with the approbation of his wife, and perhaps he felt obliged to confess to himself that that

blame which wounded him, though unintentionally, must be just. In his inordinate self-love, he intended to triumph over the resistance of his wife's heart and mind; he was resolved on this, let it cost him what it would. He had no doubt that their mutual happiness would be greater, were she to renounce her individuality. How sad was the victory he wished to obtain!

For many days Madame de Vaudreuil avoided being left alone with her husband. She feared to measure the distance at which he held himself from her. His cold and distantly polite manners were nothing in the presence of others, but in a *tête-à-tête* they would be insupportable. In reality, it was not so much her words, as the feelings which he knew his wife entertained, that made him so angry. She was humble before God; she deplored evil; she loved Christ the Reconciler; her whole life tended to the recovery of lost perfection. In all this she appeared to M. de Vaudreuil to set him at defiance. When he had examined with his intellect the awful problems of existence, he had declared them insoluble, and had plunged into scepticism. When his heart, in its turn, had demanded a solution, he found it more convenient to deny the existence of these problems; no, evil is a delusion, all is beautiful and good, all is divine; he had only to place himself in harmony with all things, to lose himself in God, to lull himself to that vague state of mind which would blunt impressions. He had tried this, and if he had not succeeded, might he not lay the blame on his wife, who had disturbed him in his efforts? It was absolutely necessary that she should follow in his track, or that he should separate from her, if he would attain to happiness.

Notwithstanding the Marchioness's efforts to avoid being alone with her husband, a few days after their last conversation he entered the room where she was sitting alone. She grew pale as she saw him. A few minutes would tell her whether his displeasure had vanished, or whether it was only more firmly established. She dreaded the fatal discovery, and had not courage to speak first.

"I have been writing to Maurice," he said, "to beg of him to come and spend a few days here. He just suits me; he and I get on capitally together."

"I shall be very glad to see him," she replied, without seeming to notice what was implied in M. de Vaudreuil's words.

"Really!" he replied, "I am astonished at that; Maurice is one of my friends."

"That is no reason why he should not be one of mine also."

"Pardon me, but we have not the same tastes."

"But may we not have the same affections?"

"It would surprise me very much if we had."

"Ah! Victor"——

"I do not like apostrophes," interrupted the Marquis; "and since we are alone now, allow me to beg that you will not transgress the limits that I laid down. It might lead to unpleasant explanations between us. You chose to live a life apart, and must take the consequences."

She looked at her husband in unfeigned surprise. She had expected passionate, almost violent words from him, but this perfect calm, this cold indifference, she could not understand. In vain she taxed her memory to discover what she had said or done that could have led to this rupture, for so she considered it.

"Do not trouble yourself," he said, "to recall unimportant expressions. I might have thought it natural enough that you should judge severely of opinions you had not sufficiently examined; but I have seen beyond your words; you are determined to resist my influence. You have chosen this act of supreme independence. There is no means of walking in harmony with you; let us say no more about it. If, however, you should renounce the opinions and ideas which displease me, and your spirit of criticism and intolerance, perhaps we may understand one another. Until then, there can be no union between you and me."

"Then there will never be," she said, sorrowfully.

"That depends on yourself."

He left the room as he entered it, calm, haughty, and with his accustomed ease, and real satisfaction depicted on his countenance. Had he known what a blow he had inflicted, he could not thus tranquilly have gone away. He would have detested himself for his deed. But it is the misfortune of those who go beyond, or stifle their natural feeling, not to understand the natural or spontaneous sentiments of others.

She remained a long time motionless, and as if stunned by what she had heard. From this moment she scarcely breathed freely again. Her heart was broken. She felt that happiness, even relative happiness, was gone for ever. The passionate love she had felt for M. de Vaudreuil had stood the test of many rude shocks, but, until now, the grief of not understanding one another had been a tie between them. They had both mourned their lost intimate communion. Now, M. de Vaudreuil grieved no

more ; he seemed to delight in giving slights, and inflicting hard words, and cutting actions. And yet, how could she renounce her faith ? Jesus Christ was her life. She could not deny Him without denying herself ; she felt that all her strength was in Him. What would union with her husband be at the expense of the foundation and base of her life ?

There was a time when her husband might have taxed her with superstition ; but now her religion was nothing more than the close union of her soul with Christ—that Christ who brings pardon to the soul of man, reinstating and restoring it. There was nothing exclusive or narrow in this. It was a constant aspiration after perfection. It did not once occur to her that she could renounce this ; to do so, would have been to renounce her whole inner life. She embraced still more warmly the cross that was placed between her and her earthly happiness ; she pressed it more earnestly to her torn heart, and adored Him who suffered thereon, with all the intensity of love and sorrow that self-sacrifice alone can produce.

When I saw the Marchioness again, I was struck with her air of deep dejection. She appeared weary of life ; and this lasted for a long time. But after the first shock, when her suffering was too acute not to be outwardly observed, she carefully concealed her feelings. She made extraordinary efforts to prevent others seeing her husband's neglect ; she tried to appear as if she bore lightly the wrongs he inflicted on her, but she sank under the effort. Although she tried to smile when he entered, the deadly paleness of her cheeks, and the agitation of her features, betrayed her secret agony. She dared no longer

approach him with tenderness—some attempts she had made were so rudely repulsed ; and how could she appear indifferent ? As for M. de Vaudreuil, he scarcely ever spoke to his wife, and never sought her. At the hours of repast, and in the evenings, he conversed with assumed vivacity, either with M. de Lussac or with Maurice, who had accepted his invitation. Sometimes he would turn abruptly to the Marchioness, and ask her some trifling question, fixing his black, piercing eye upon her. An overdrawn, distant politeness was his usual bearing towards her. My good guardian, who understood so well what was said to him, never guessed what was silently going on ; and therefore observed nothing. But I saw all, and I was indignant with the Marquis.

CHAPTER VII.

M. DE VAUDREUIL had invited Maurice in the hope that his friend's enthusiasm would sustain his own, for he felt its fictitious, precarious character. Fear for what might succeed these reveries made him cling fondly to them. To begin to suffer again what he went through after Roger's death, was more than he could have borne ; and yet he knew, that if he did not (to use his own expression) succeed in drowning his thoughts in the vague sea of the indefinite, all those terrible thoughts of death, evil, God, and the inexplicable destiny of man, would again seize hold of him. To escape such agony there would then remain but one means : to kill the moral life within him, and every aspiration after the infinite, to concentrate himself on earth, and to love its poor earthly goods as much as he could. Sad resource for a naturally generous mind, richly endowed with all that could raise him above the prosaic region of self-interest ! Better have the appearance of life than this hopeless death !

Maurice's visit did not produce on M. de Vaudreuil the effect he had anticipated ; it did not prevent him from feeling disgust at the ideas that, after all, were only a subterfuge of his heart. He now felt all their emptiness, and, indignant with himself for having for an instant

entertained enthusiasm for mere negations, and for confounding, in his repugnance and contempt, true elevation of mind with what was only its weak parody, he conceived a violent hatred to all illusions of the heart, as he had before done to the chimeras of the mind, and sought in reality, so long despised, for something wherewith to satisfy the mind that neither thought nor sentiment could fill. Would activity satisfy him? At least he thought it might, and had already drawn out in imagination a brilliant part to play. He was to leave his retreat and his meditations, to take part in the great work of mankind, in public life, in questions of general interest and difficult to carry out. He was tired of idleness—he must act; and in action seek amends for the defeat which he felt had humbled him—launch out into ambition, seek for personal success, and in these lose the remembrance of his wanderings.

Activity is one of the requirements of our nature, for which I have great respect. It alone gives to the other faculties that unity which heightens their value; it alone discovers the hidden treasure, and transforms it into productive capital. But still there must be an end assigned to it; the mind must have a thought to realise—the heart an object to pursue; and if the mind has no thought, and the heart no object, if we act for acting's sake, or think for thinking's sake, what is it but the denial of that moral unity in which the dignity of man consists? It has often been said, to live for self is not living. The same may be applied to the other faculties. If the intellect does not furnish the heart with new objects requiring its warmth, if the heart does not vivify the thoughts, if

both together do not produce a motive for activity, we may say that neither of these isolated powers is really exercised,—or at least they are only exercised in a false or incomplete manner.

Was M. de Vaudreuil come to this ? Alas ! deprived of his convictions, and his feelings grown cold, what henceforth could be his object, save himself ? It must be confessed, in all his plans his great object was himself. To make use of men to satisfy his ambition, to place himself on a pedestal by the help of those ideas which he ought to have gladly served, in short, to build a temple, and be himself at once the god and the worshipper—such was his dream ; the disgraceful and final dream of many who know not how to preserve, or rather, how to foster, their natural generosity, the sacred passion for the good and the beautiful. This was a great fall—it might be a fatal one. Personal ambition, more than any other passion, holds the soul in bondage. Unceasingly exacting in its demands for sacrifices of dignity and opinion, by degrees it degrades the mind, triumphing over every generous instinct which it has smothered, every act of devotion it has prevented. And yet, there are falls deeper and more awful—falls from which ambition such as is described above, would be an upward step. The fall of M. de Vaudreuil was that which happens to proud minds at the critical moment of life, when, after having in vain pursued the infinite under the many different names of love, truth, and religion, they end in believing that the finite is our all.

With all the freedom from suspicion which belongs to a simple and noble mind, the Marchioness had no idea at

first of the selfish character of her husband's intentions. When she heard him speak of his projects for the future, of his wish to spend the following winter in Paris among his political friends, and to consecrate himself to such or such an object, with all the powers of his mind, she believed sincerely that his enthusiasm led him to do so, and she admired his ardour. She did not know that in serving by his activity a cause which he already despised, his only design was self-aggrandisement. He intended to play a part, to absorb himself in clever calculations, not to devote himself to a principle in which he had the slightest faith.

However, by degrees Madame de Vaudreuil's eyes were opened. Her husband so little concealed his pride and self-love, and boasted so complacently of his new motives to action, that it was impossible in the end not to understand him. She saw now that M. de Vaudreuil was arrived at that compromise with life, against which he had so long struggled. His coldness towards her was not the result of disinterested preoccupation; but his affection was really stifled by mean desires and frivolous thoughts. Irritability is easier to bear than indifference, for anger is a passion. Indifference itself, on the part of a being whom we admire, and whom we feel to be raised to a higher sphere than our own, may seem justifiable. A warm heart thinks more of loving than of inspiring love. But to admire no longer!—to see him to whom she had given herself take pleasure in lowering and dragging in the dust the noble soul so fitted to take a high place!—oh! let us beware of sounding the depths of such sorrow!

The Marquis soon saw the painful impression made

upon his wife's mind. It made him hate still more the sentiments which condemned his own ; and during the time which was to elapse before his departure for Paris, he maintained the greatest reserve, and lived alone.

I was beginning to feel life at Vieilcastel terribly dull, when Gaston, according to the intention he had expressed the year before, came to pass some time in the Pyrenees. He divided his time between Ermont and Vieilcastel ; but I must say he was much oftener at Madame de Vaudreuil's than at Maurice's house. This visit restored me to my usual spirits and vivacity.

One morning, when I was occupied near the castle with some favourite plants, Gaston came up to me and began to talk. It was one of those sweet, almost melancholy days in September, when we feel so much inclined for solitude, and closer communion with Nature. A grey vapour, almost as transparent as gauze, covered the sky without hiding the sun's rays. A fresh breeze came over the hills, and chased the faded yellow leaves. We saw them whirling about for a few seconds, as if they regretted the branch that had borne them, and the life they were leaving ; then they mingled with the dust of the road, already strewed with the spoils of summer. As we conversed, we pursued unthinkingly, first one shady walk, and then another, till we found ourselves in the wood. I had never lived in towns, and knew little of the rules of society ; so that the idea never occurred to me that there could be anything singular in rambling over the mountains alone with a young man. And Gaston was so delighted to act as guide to me, that he had not courage to stop.

After having walked a long way, we came to the thickest part of the wood ; on whichever side we looked, immense trees intercepted the view. Before us was a glade all carpeted with the softest turf, and here and there were lying felled trees which the woodmen had not yet carried away. I heard the gushing of a spring, but its stream was so small that the silver thread was lost in the long grass, and I could not follow it. The sound alone told me of its being there.

" You must be tired," said Gaston ; " will you not sit down ? "

I accepted his offer, and in an instant was installed on a bank of moss and dead leaves. Gaston leant against the trunk of a tree opposite to me, and for some time we both were silent, enjoying the calm retreat.

" If I had a book, I could stay here all day," said I.

" Here is one," replied Gaston, " which I was going to propose reading to you ; " and he drew a small volume from his pocket.

Now it seemed to me that Gaston's pocket could only contain serious books, and I expected at least to find funeral orations ; so I opened the book rather reluctantly. What was my astonishment to see at the top of the page, " Corinne."

" What ! " I cried, " a romance ? "

" Why not ? it is one of the most beautiful books I know."

" I am very sorry ; but I must beg you not to read it to me."

" You will not hear ' Corinne ? ' "

" No."

"No?"

Gaston's face assumed a look of the most laughable surprise.

"It is not for want of inclination," I said; "but I have resolved not to read novels."

"But I remember that you read many last year."

"Indeed, I read too many; and to atone for doing so, I threw into the river the key of that compartment in the library containing the novels."

"First taking care to leave it unlocked," said Gaston.

"No, no; it was firmly and honestly closed."

He could not help laughing at my heroism.

"You may read 'Corinne' without breaking your resolution," he said; "it is not a romance, but a most striking picture of human destiny."

And, without listening to my objections, Gaston took the volume and began to read.

The forest and my companion at first somewhat distracted my attention, but soon I was completely absorbed in the reading. I should in vain attempt to describe my feelings. The first perception of beauty could not cause more emotion. Sometimes Gaston stopped, and looked up in my face inquiringly. I made a sign to him to go on, and when, at the end of two hours, his lungs and voice failed him, I seized the book, and read rapidly, only stopping at intervals because of the beating of my heart. What magic influence this 'Corinne' had over me! How I yielded to her sway! What marvellous talent! What enchanting poetry! What great need of love, and what generous love bestowed! What genius! How much charm, and how much weakness too! Oh, Corinne! how

you captivated me! It seemed to me that I, a poor, limited, inferior creature, could, through admiration, understand you! I could silently have devoted myself to you, and carefully have dried the tears which your own genius within, and stormy passions without, caused to flow!

Gaston enjoyed my emotion. He knew how precious such moments are in one's life, and he was proud to have been the means of bestowing such on me. But the day was declining; the shadows of the forest lengthened, and, falling on the page, interrupted my reading. I threw the book from me, and covering my face with my hands, I could not restrain the tears which the quick feelings of my heart brought to my eyes.

"I was sure," said Gaston, "that you would admire 'Corinne.'"

"Who could fail to be touched by it?" I cried.

"Many people."

"But who?"

"Those who call Corinne an actress, and Oswald a visionary."

"But tell me, Gaston, has any one really made use of these expressions applied to them?"

"Yes," he replied, smiling.

I looked at him inquiringly, but he would not reply to my silent request.

"It is Casimir, I am sure, who has judged them so correctly; but how came he to read such a book?"

"To send him to sleep after dinner; and, believe me, although it is not every one who dare confess that he prefers the miserable fictions of the present day, to works

which genius inspired by the heart has produced, Casimir is not the only one who thinks as he does."

"You will make me hate my neighbour."

"No, Gabrielle, he does not deserve hatred ; but he wants light, and—shall I say it?—virtue. Yes, virtue ; for, rightly to admire the works which appeal to the noblest feelings of man, certain dispositions are necessary which lie very near morality."

"So, Gaston, the admiration with which this beautiful book has inspired me, will make you conceive a high idea of my character !"

"At the risk of making you conceive a very poor one of mine, I must tell you I do not feel at all disposed to admire you just now."

"Why not ?"

"*'Détestables flatteurs, présent le plus funeste'*—you know the rest."

"I know that I cannot endure the pedantic air you assume sometimes."

"I am very sorry for it."

"You may well be so. But what nonsense were you talking just now about morality ?"

"Oh ! nothing."

"Do not let me prevent you ; I am quite ready to hear."

"It will tire you."

"No ; but I cannot help laughing when you begin to moralise."

"You are jesting."

"I shall jest, whatever you may say ; so speak, for you will never have a more favourable opportunity."

"I was going to say — but there, you are laughing."

"Oh! take no notice; I have cried so much, I must laugh now. Strong emotions sometimes throw us into the opposite extreme."

"There was indeed enough to make you weep," said my companion; "what a striking picture of human destiny!"

"But is it true, Gaston, that they who do not demean themselves by bringing down their minds to the common state of careless happiness, or self-interest, are yet condemned to die of hope deferred, and aspirations unfulfilled?"

"When the heart is devoted to the ideal, and seeks it upon earth, it does not find it, Gabrielle. We may pursue it; to do so, indeed, is the task of our life. We must realise our ideal; but we never meet it. Because she found it not, Corinne died. She was the victim of mistaken love, not for Oswald, but for all that Oswald personified in her eyes. Nature alone could go no further. To seek, to seek without ceasing, and to seek in vain, and then to die of thirst, without cursing life, without despairing of the good beyond, this is the highest point to which the most sublime morality of man can attain."

"Oh, Gaston! this book is bitter, too bitter."

"It is only sad. No one reading it will conclude that he had better avoid these heights. He sees the abyss at his feet, and takes the risk of falling in, rather than remain content with such happiness as weak sentiments and thoughts of no elevation can procure him. He will understand that the dignity of man consists in attaching his heart, not to things as they are, but to things as they ought to be, and as they will be one day."

"But if one should fall, and be killed in the fall?"

"I know one who was killed."

"Who was he?"

"Victor."

"No," I said ; "far from falling into the bitter grief which seizes the soul when it cannot attain to its ideal—far from suffering and dying because of it, M. de Vaudreuil has denied it ; he believes now only in earthly things, in the finite, in self."

"That is what I call being killed, or degraded, if you prefer that term. Oh! I cannot tell you how grieved I am to see that man, formerly so generous-minded, so enthusiastic, now given up to cold calculation, and mean ambition!"

I picked up the book, which was near me, and gave it again to Gaston ; then, rising from my mossy seat, I leant against a tall fir-tree, and passed my arm round its slender trunk ; I grieved to leave the spot.

"You are not ambitious then, Gaston? Yet glory is a beautiful thing."

He smiled, but did not reply. Nothing is so trying to me as silence. People must either agree with me, or contradict me. So I pressed him eagerly to give me his opinion.

"I think," he said, at last, "that it is a great privilege for the masses of the people to be able to confer glory ; but it betrays littleness of soul to seek it, as also to seek honours. We ought to propose to ourselves for our object something for its own sake, not for our own interest. Besides, I think that glory is a word which great minds only make use of for want of another. They desire free play

for their faculties, and would shed a beneficent influence around them. This is all legitimate. If they ask for glory, it is only as a sanction to the casting aside of that diffidence of themselves which may trouble even the strongest mind. But Victor is far from this."

"He cares but for one object, one idea—himself."

"And yet," said Gaston, "there is a happiness——"

"Oh! pray," I cried, "don't let us speak of happiness, it is the most wearisome subject."

My companion stood still, and looked astonished, but he soon resumed—

"Should you find him wearisome also, whose every care should be to make you happy?"

"Certainly, if I was obliged to be always contemplating his kind intentions."

The twilight had passed. It was already night, and we were far from Vieilcastel. Gaston's last words had added fuel to the fire already kindled in my heart by the long reading. We took the road to the castle without more words. Happily for me, on our exit from the forest there was rather more light; for one of those fits of timidity which sometimes take hold of honest hearts when aware of having transgressed the rules of propriety, had so seized upon Gaston, that I believe I might a hundred times have fallen to the bottom of the precipice, and he would not have put out his hand to help me. When we truly love, we so easily think ourselves in the wrong.

We found all the household alarmed at our absence. My guardian scolded me severely, which, however, has not prevented my preserving to this day a delightful remembrance of our walk. It is true that I discovered on Madame

de Vaudreuil's lips an indulgent smile, which afforded great relief to my conscience.

I have often observed, that, as regards the rules of propriety, good and upright men are much stricter than women. How is this? I do not think it can be that men have more delicacy, but rather that woman, with her exquisite tact, is able to put the seal of her own dignity on every circumstance. Men, on the contrary, require fixed and strict rules to keep them within right limits, and to warn them when they transgress. They like best wide roads, well furnished on each side with ditches and barriers. Women have a decided preference for pretty paths on the brink of the precipice. Cannot we find a way less monotonous than the high road—less dangerous than the narrow one?

After a visit of some weeks at Vieilcastel, Gaston left us. I had attained by degrees to a very pleasant and easy footing with him. Although we both observed a certain reserve in the expression of our mutual sentiments, we conversed freely upon the most intimate subjects. His affection for me was a thing admitted, but we did not speak of it; we only acted upon its acknowledgment; and this absence of words did not prevent our understanding one another, and added a new charm to our intercourse. As we were to meet in Paris before very long, Gaston's departure did not give me much pain. There was more hope than regret in our parting.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER a short tour in the Pyrenees, M. de Beaugency surprised us one day with a visit, and the intention of spending some days at Vieilcastel. M. de Vaudreuil was delighted to see him ; for notwithstanding the difference of their character, he felt a sort of affection for him. In the days of passion and enthusiasm, M. de Beaugency had laughed at the Marquis, it is true, but he also understood and bore with him. Rendered indulgent by a stormy and much regretted youth, he knew how to excuse the excesses of a heart that neither accepted the reality of life, nor could conform to its claims. To believe our destiny explicable, truth within reach of our efforts, and happiness possible, he thought a sad, but generous and amiable error. Had not this error been his own ? M. de Vaudreuil, in his pride, and recently adopted contempt for all elevated sentiments, expected to find an echo in his friend's mind, and received him with real pleasure.

One evening, when we were assembled in the drawing-room, M. de Beaugency asked the Marquis if he often saw Maurice.

"Very seldom," replied M. de Vaudreuil. "He has taken a great fancy to me; and torments me with his

grand words, and constantly high-flown sentiments. I know nothing so unbearable as that pretension of living always above other people."

"I am astonished that Maurice inspires you with so much disgust," said M. de Beaugency. "Some time ago you were a less severe judge of delusions, and I even laughed at you for entertaining the same yourself, and in return you charged me with having a grovelling heart and a narrow mind."

"Listen, Beaugency," replied the Marquis, impatiently ; "the time is past when vain thoughts were sufficient to sooth my mind. Forget, I pray you, the past, as I have forgotten it myself. The errors of youth, wandering in the pursuit of good never to be realised, cannot and must not influence a whole life. Now, I understand existence better, such as it is, and I rule myself accordingly, instead of trying to raise it to the level of my dreams. Speak no longer to me as to a sick man or a fool ; time has cured me, and now I hold in contempt the false ideas and strained sentiments which have so long possessed me."

M. de Beaugency was reclining in an arm-chair, his arms crossed, and his head on one side, looking at the Marquis with a penetrating eye, that seemed to say—I know all, and can see further and understand more than you can tell me.

"So, my dear Vaudreuil," he said at last, "you are undeceived."

"I think myself more fit for life than I was. Ah ! if I could tell you how deeply I deplore the years I passed so grievously deceived—what feelings I entertain towards

those who contributed to my errors ! When I renounced my first opinions, I thought for a long time that it was absolutely necessary for me to adopt others concerning God, the soul, and all those things about which I was obliged to hear so much. Years were consumed in these fruitless efforts ; for I thought the dignity of man depended on their results."

"Do you still think so?" asked M. de Beaugency, with ironical *nonchalance*.

"Do I still think so? Oh! I hate the vain labour that ends in nothing. What glory, what influence, what honours might I not already have acquired, had I pursued a reasonable object! Instead of which, I have spent my youth in foolish dreams. How useless to me are all those insolvable problems! The future is unknown; I will profit by the present. It belongs to me; and no one, oh! no one," he repeated, casting a look of triumph towards Madame de Vaudreuil, "shall prevent me enjoying life as I please. Oh! the insolence of those proud minds for whom the world does not suffice! What haughty condemnation they seem to pronounce on those who cannot be content, as they are, to mourn for ever over the disproportion between their wants, and what life has wherewith to satisfy them! How disdainful they are! How more and more devoted to their own chimeras! Ah! I feel that I hate, not only their tendencies, but themselves! Let them leave me to be happy in my own way. Let me employ that activity that requires the world for its field, and complicated, difficult affairs. I was not made to vegetate for ever in private life. The faded sentiments of my youth are not sufficient for me; I must have a wide field for action."

M. de Beaugency listened with all the sustained attention of a man who judges and weighs all things, and is never led away. His coolness allowed him leisure to consider every word his friend uttered ; but he sighed over his bitter expressions. M. de Vaudreuil did not seem more reasonable than before, and he pleased him less. When a man is arrived at the full possession of his faculties, and only makes use of them to attempt to exalt himself, or if after the attempt he fails, it is like a second fall, more glaring perhaps in the eyes of his fellow-men, more degrading, more grievous. Although fallen himself a degree lower than the Marquis, M. de Beaugency could not see without sorrow his friend's change of mind. He had laughed much at his delusions, much despised the weakness of mind that could not resign itself to the sad conditions of humanity ; and now, when he saw him reconciled to his fate, it afforded him no satisfaction, but rather another proof of human misery. He could smile at it, for he felt that he knew the misery which others ignored ; but he was forced to confess that knowledge brings with it little consolation.

"And yet," said he, "it is a beautiful delusion ! and how excusable ! You and I are no longer susceptible of it ; but why should we hate it ? I like to study it. For those who know life in its reality, is it not interesting to watch the impression made by things of the world upon artless minds ? Their ideas, so false, and yet so graceful, have a touching attraction. We are grieved because we see reality through their dreams ; but their dreams are enchanting."

And he looked at the Marchioness.

"At a distance," said M. de Vaudreuil, "I can understand such to be the effect; but in the common intercourse of life, such absurdities, far from enchanting, irritate you, and become insupportable. If you are absorbed in endeavours to attain some object, or to occupy some position, instead of joining in your legitimate ambition, or wishing you success, they affect a superhuman disinterestedness. They seek to bring earth near to heaven, and can only succeed in making it distasteful. They are full of unreasonable passions, and absurd ideas about what affection should be. Instead of the easy, simple connexion that results from common interest, you are tormented with their aspirations after some romantic friendship, over which God himself is to preside; and at last, what with superior sentiments, and flights of affection beyond the clouds, you become disgusted even with ordinary and well-regulated ones."

"Poor Maurice!" said M. de Beaugency.

He knew quite well that it was Madame de Vaudreuil of whom the Marquis was thinking. Her eyes were bent on the ground, and she played with her fingers, and appeared not to be listening.

"Irritation is only affection in disguise; do you not think so, madame?" he said, approaching her.

She raised her head. Her look expressed such acute, such deep suffering, that he was struck with compassion, and turned away respectfully. She left the seat she had occupied, and walked towards the door; but before going out, she cast one glance at her husband. He had advanced to the balcony, and did not see her. She looked at him for an instant with a look of such pity, such love

and devotion ! She opened her lips to speak ; but with a sigh, as if she knew her words would be superfluous, she left the room.

There was a long silence. M. de Beaugency had seated himself at the table, and opposite the Marquis, upon whom his eyes rested with all the indignation of which he was capable.

“ Do you not perceive, then, my poor Vaudreuil, that you have only driven away your old delusions to make way for fresh ones, more monstrous than the former, and less noble ? ”

“ What is it ? ” asked M. de Vaudreuil, turning quickly.

“ The delusion of which you are yourself the object. ”

“ What ! do you not think me capable of succeeding in my designs ? ”

“ On the contrary, I think you quite capable. ”

“ Well, then ? ”

“ Well ? The prospect of success inspires you with more pride than obtained success could give. The less right you feel to exact the admiration of others, before you have realised anything, the more disposed you are to bestow it on yourself in an unlimited degree. In a short time it will not be so. The disproportion between what you have accomplished, and the efforts you have expended, will be painful. You will regret having devoted so much time to the raising of your poor human self on to I know not what pedestal of honour and influence. Then you and I will be of the same opinion. ”

The Marquis cast a glance of pride and astonishment on M. de Beaugency ; but the latter continued—

“ We are worth very little, my dear friend ; it is well to

know this, but not to despair because we know it. What is the good of trying to hide our misery under rags, more or less gilded? To acknowledge the reality and resign oneself to it, is the only wise part, and you will come to this."

I remembered what Gaston had said to me a few days before; unceasingly to pursue the ideal, and to die of hope deceived, is the highest point to which human virtue can attain. M. de Beaugency had not sufficient strength of mind to resist destiny. He accepted it, knowing, however, what he accepted.

"Do not attempt," said M. de Vaudreuil, "to deter me from activity; it is indispensable to my happiness."

"Happiness!" said M. de Beaugency, with a smile not unmingled with bitterness; "happiness! You, an undeceived man, and dreaming still of happiness!"

"Every one seeks to drag through existence in the best possible manner," replied M. de Vaudreuil, "and I have chosen mine."

M. de Beaugency took his friend's arm, and drew him into the next room.

"Really, Vaudreuil, you ought not to make such a parade of your sentiments. To set them forth as you do, passes the common bounds of moderation. You see what pain you inflict on your wife. But I fear, my poor friend, you will never be reasonable."

M. de Beaugency was more interested in Madame de Vaudreuil's happiness than perhaps in any other thing. He could not bear that her natural and passionate aspirations should be repulsed, even though they drew forth his smiles; for could he refrain a smile at what must end in

nothing? Had he not discovered the inutility of faith in happiness—belief in the true and the good? The love of God and man, what was it but folly? But this folly affected him strangely. He could have wished that it had been wisdom. In his better hours, after which, however, he reproached himself for his weakness, he had even asked himself, whether, taking everything into consideration, for hearts less worn than his own restoration was not possible; and he sighed, as he found to what a hard dry state his own heart was reduced.

The next day, when he found himself alone with the Marchioness, and saw that she still bore the air of deep melancholy that had excited his compassion and respect the night before, he approached her embroidery-frame, and playing with her silks, without raising his eyes, for he dared not meet hers—

“You will not be sorry,” said he, “to leave your cold retreat next winter.”

“No, indeed; but I do not fear the winter in our mountains. We have some of Nature’s sublimest notes in the storms of winter. When all things are covered with the same snowy mantle which preserves warmth in the bosom of the earth, I think of the germ of life, hidden in apparently the most frozen hearts, and my confidence in God grows stronger.”

“You are right,” said he; “but I think romantic women generally only understand very young or very old men. While we are unfortunately passing through the middle or ripe age, they are astonished at us, and grieve for us, or else turn away from us. This is unjust; the earth does remain warm under the snow.”

"I am not romantic," she said, with a smile.

"No, you are enthusiastic in the best sense of the word. You must pardon us, if for a time we are not so. Less high, or less disinterested feelings, may conceal our generous dispositions."

"Or rather, perhaps, replace them."

Yes, replace them. M. de Beaugency knew that she said the truth; but he knew also that the thought was painful to her. He would willingly have blotted it out from her mind.

"Confess, however," he said, "that there is at least something beautiful in the free development of man's activity."

He said this in the tone of one who is far from being convinced of the truth of his own words.

"You do not appear to admire it much," she replied.

"I am too cold, but you are very different."

"And would you, the bitter enemy of all delusions, inspire me with a new one?"

"They suit you so well."

"Thank you for your good intentions, but much as I love and admire earth, with heaven in view, I find earth distasteful when we lose the distant prospect. Oh! I know, too, how much you despise it."

"Certainly, earth without delusions is like a lake on which the rays of the sun are no longer reflected. I despise it because I see only it, and not the chimeras which gave it beauty in my eyes."

"No, it is not so, but because what is really worth loving has not yet spoken to your heart."

An ironical smile passed over M. de Beaugency's fea-

tures, then a sigh escaped him. He was, in fact, regretting his vanished delusions. Madame de Vaudreuil came up to him, and said—

“Allow me one question. Are you happy?”

“I find life very supportable. When reason governs all one’s sentiments and ideas, one is always easy. Who is it that is not happy?”

“You, perhaps.”

“Oh! you are charming,” he said, and he began to laugh, but he said no more. The conversation began to be unpleasant to him. We know that sometimes, the wind blowing over an extinguished fire, raises the ashes from the hearth.

M. de Beaugency left Vieilcastel, much impressed with the appearance of great suffering in the Marchioness. Her step was uncertain, her graceful, elegant figure bent, and her pale cheeks speaking of illness as well as sorrow; but her expression was more beautiful than ever. When she raised her eyes to heaven, you might have thought they pierced the azure vault, and saw beyond our vision, what no human tongue can describe; then when they were bent again on those around her, what compassion, what indulgence, what angelic hope they expressed!

CHAPTER IX.

It must be confessed that personal ambition is in the highest degree degrading to the human heart. It is, in fact, only selfishness, active, or rather passionate selfishness. Still, I can understand that it may meet with indulgence, and even be considered as a virtue, compared with effeminacy and the complete idleness in which some men consume their lives. It testifies at least that the mind possessed of it is not dead; and if the talents employed are misused, still they are talents, and all hope of amendment is not lost. But, considered by itself, what a fall it entails! Self, always self, no other idea, no other object, no devotion, to men or things! There was a time when a loftier ambition filled M. de Vaudreuil's heart. When he struggled painfully in the search after truth, when he devoted himself fervently to a cause, he would willingly have consented to any sacrifice—his rank, his fortune, himself, provided he could have found what he sought, and wrought the triumph of the cause he served. This was noble and great, but it was also difficult and trying. To pursue the realization of a true idea, and accept for its sake all rebuffs, all contempt, all defeats; to see it often misunderstood and despised, and yet never to

relax ; to devote oneself to it with more fervour because it is less victorious ; to feel one's heart beat, and almost break with the intensity of one's desires ;—this is a lot, steeped in tears, no doubt, but worthy of man and man's activity ; if the savour is bitter, it is a wholesome and strengthening savour.

To cherish ambition like this, to devote one's life to an idea, belief in something is absolutely necessary. M. de Vaudreuil no longer believed in truth ; he had denied everything but himself ; henceforth he could only serve himself. I do not know exactly what plans he proposed to himself for the carrying out of his new designs. I only know that through M. de Chambrie he hoped to take part in some intrigues, not at all conformable to his real opinions. Uniting himself to a party from which in his heart he separated, he only proposed to set forth *himself*, to prepare a path for himself. Never before had he undertaken anything so contrary to his conscience. It was indeed a fall, a frightful fall.

These selfish thoughts had by degrees made such havoc in his heart, that he no longer thought of concealing them. Through all the previous changes of his inner life, the thought of his wife's grief had greatly affected him ; but now, his own happiness was his sole concern. During M. de Beaugency's visit, some irritation still remained with him ; but now that had all given way to indifference, and he did not care to conceal his coldness. He did not even make a parade of it with that affectation which shews that the heart within is not yet grown cold. He did nothing with regard to Madame de Vaudreuil ; he did not even try to give her pain. The cruel words he had often

spoken to her, he still repeated—not that they might distress her, but because they came to his lips, and he did not care to restrain them.

And Madame de Vaudreuil ! She presented the most perfect image of deep, silent grief. To be no longer loved ! Ah ! she had never anticipated this. Once before, her husband had been for a time estranged from her. He could not endure the narrow forms of her devotion, and often made her feel this acutely ; but then at least he had a pretext. She knew that in many things she had been deceived, and had mistaken for religion what was only its appearance ; but it was no longer so. It was what was really most worthy in her, her love to God, her ceaseless efforts after goodness, that seemed to increase her husband's indifference to her. Every struggle of her heart towards the infinite, every feeling of repulsion at the sight of all compromise with evil, cost her a glance of contempt, or a hard word from M. de Vaudreuil. Had he then fallen so low ? She no longer recognised him. He was no longer the same who had once surrounded her with tender care. She sought him under this strange disguise, and could not find him. Neglected, and held for nothing in her husband's life, her days passed heavily. Two beloved beings awaited her in heaven. These, indeed, she felt she had not lost ; but he who was always present, yet so far from her, had she indeed lost him for ever ?

For a long time she carefully and silently concealed the sorrow which was undermining her frame. The fear of displeasing her husband stopped the words she would have uttered ; but soon she saw that her precautions were useless. He knew her too well for her to be able to tell

him anything, and therefore she spared herself all needless restraint. It was strange to see these two, husband and wife, calm towards one another—he because he was cold, she, because she was exhausted—conversing freely, expressing the most contrary opinions, without coming in contact with one another, or seeming to give offence to one another; for they never spoke in reference to each other, but each on his or her own account. They followed, as it were, two parallel lines which never meet. My heart was sorrowful at the sight; my guardian only too glad that the violent discussions were over.

This was the state of things when the day previous to the one fixed upon for our departure for Paris arrived. Madame de Vaudreuil was suffering more than usual, and the November snows which covered the mountains had brought an increase to her symptoms. When all the preparations for our journey were completed, I came and sat down beside her. She coughed much, and could not talk, and her hand was very feverish. She begged me to read to her. I opened Pascal, and read a few pages. I was just at these striking words—"We can never truly know God till we know our sins," when M. de Vaudreuil entered. He heard these words, looked displeased, took the book from me, and, after turning over some pages, threw it on the table with contempt.

"The snow prevents Maurice from coming to say farewell to us," observed the Marchioness, as if to break the silence.

"So much the better."

"He tires you," she said, "and me also. He is too high-flown, and this without sufficient reasons."

"Is it his affection for me that inspires you with this opinion?"

"Not that more than other things, but that also. He admires you without knowing you. And if he were asked to describe you, the portrait he would draw might resemble Thales or Pythagoras quite as much as you."

"To judge from your ecstatic meditations," he said, in a mocking voice and manner, "one would imagine you a great advocate for enthusiasm."

"Yes, certainly, for enthusiasm which aspires to all that is beautiful, good, and true—which seizes upon every fragment to be found here below, carefully wiping the dust from it, without weeping the less over its imperfections. But what I cannot suffer is that blind enthusiasm which makes reality its idol, and is taken up with the good things and pleasures of life, without seeing their inefficiency; which is contented with nature and art—with the world, in short—instead of using all these to sharpen the desires, and increase the thirst after higher and better things. I even prefer irony to such enthusiasm."

"Certainly you cannot be accused of such enthusiasm. No, no; you are not one of those frivolous persons who entertain a little indulgence for this poor world. You are devoted to the worship of the ideal; and not being able to attain to it, you yet refuse to make life supportable. It suits me to accommodate myself to what is, rather than to deceive myself in eternal chimeras."

"To improve reality where we can, and endure what cannot be changed, would be, perhaps, nobler."

"Wonderful! We understand one another better and better. A little more, and the harmony will be complete.

But, indeed, I do very well ; and we had better each follow our own path."

He went out of the room, but as he went his eyes fell on Roger's portrait. That little face, so sweet and loving, too young to bear a trace of self-interest or ambition, went straight to M. de Vaudreuil's heart. An indiscreet tear started to his eye ; but he hastened to his study, and there tried to absorb his thoughts in his books.

In a few minutes the door behind him opened, and a light step was heard. He knew quite well that it was the Marchioness, but he did not turn his head. A hand was placed on his shoulder.

"Victor," said Madame de Vaudreuil, "I must speak with you."

"What do you want with me ?" he asked. "Do not let us have a scene, for I hate them."

The Marchioness stood motionless. Her attitude was noble, her countenance dignified, and her deep emotion softened, without destroying her rather austere air, while as much tenderness as grief beamed from her eyes.

"I have never accustomed you to scenes," she answered. "I know that tears and supplications are a woman's ordinary recourse ; I know, also, that much is yielded to their prayers, either through pity or contempt, but I have nothing to ask you ; no, it is a simple fact I come to state to you."

"Continue," said the Marquis.

"I have strength, Victor, but only to a certain point. That point is passed. It is now nearly three months that you have shewn towards me only irritability and coldness, which have grieved and offended me. I do not think I deserve

either; but however that may be, I can never grow accustomed to this."

She trembled so much that she was obliged to sit down,

"The best means of avoiding such continual shocks," said her husband, "is by keeping at a distance from them."

"I have heard it said," she replied, "that men sometimes feign a love they do not feel; but I did not know that they ever found pleasure in concealing an affection really entertained. For that you love me, I cannot doubt; why, then, this cruel sport?"

"It is not sport; you know that quite well. It is the necessity of our position. As long as you and I remain what we are, all attempt at reconciliation would be useless. Judge yourself, whether two dispositions so opposite can harmonise. We cannot even understand one another. Your life, full of exalted thoughts, pious aspirations, soaring towards the sky, appears to me to be consecrated to chimeras. I should smile at it, did I not see in it an obstacle to our happiness. On your side, you condemn me. In your eyes I am prosaic, devoid of all good feeling, because, not being able to attain to the highest, I try to draw the best I can from this poor life. Is not this true?"

He spoke with the most perfect calmness, and the last words with reproachful disdain. Madame de Vaudreuil looked at her husband for a long time without replying; and as the silence was prolonged, her countenance grew more painfully serious.

"It is true," she replied, "but it cannot last. I could, perhaps, have borne a diminution of your tenderness; for I deserved little, and received much. I would be content

with my due share. But you have done what I cannot endure ; you have robbed me of my admiration for you. Low ambition and interested motives are filling, or trying to fill, your mind, and all for what ?—that you may escape from suffering.”

“ You would like me then always to suffer ? ”

“ No, but I would like you to know your true condition. The evil, whatever the pride that burns in your eye and trembles at my words may say, the evil is in yourself. Self occupies an undue share of your heart ; better have the void, than the void so filled up.”

“ You are very fond,” he said, “ of tearing away veils, and you seem to manage it excellently.”

“ Ah ! Victor, a hand from heaven tore them away from you, and most laboriously, and with constantly renewed efforts, you have raised up new ones between you and truth.”

She rose, and moving slowly towards the casement—
“ What is that hill opposite to us ? ” she asked, “ and what those tombs, the view of which you cannot escape ? Have they taught you nothing ? Death and sorrow have only fostered your pride. O God ! to have received such lessons, and to have learned no more ! ”

She put her hand over her eyes. He did not reply ; but leaning against the window, was contemplating the funeral hill.

“ Forgive me,” she said, suddenly ; “ perhaps I have spoken too freely.”

“ Perhaps,” said he, in a hollow voice, “ perhaps. What do you hope ? when you have proved to me that I have degraded my soul, do you expect I shall be happy ? ”

The door opened abruptly. A neighbour had come to ask M. de Vaudreuil to settle some business before his departure. They went out together, and the Marchioness was left alone.

Towards evening, M. de Vaudreuil returned. I was impatiently looking for him from the door.

"Anne, sister Anne, do you see anything coming?" he said, smiling; "have I kept you waiting for dinner?"

"No, monsieur."

"I must go and put these papers in my study, and then I am at your service."

I followed him.

"Do you want anything?" he asked.

"I wished to tell you that Madame de Vaudreuil is not at all well."

"How? what is the matter?" cried the Marquis, with emotion.

"Do not be alarmed, the doctor has been here; he says that with quiet all will be right.

"But what is the matter then?"

"I had better tell you at once; she has burst a blood-vessel."

"Ah!" he cried, "can that be possible? It is not many hours since, there at that window, she sat talking to me. I remember her very words. Take me to her room," he added, rising. "I must see her."

I begged him to be calm, and he forced himself to be so before he entered his wife's apartment; but his countenance bore the impress of his heart's agitation. He advanced softly, and stood by the bed. The Marchioness had closed her eyes, a frightful pallor was spread over

her features. She did not move, and but for a flush that passed over her cheeks at intervals, we might have thought life was gone. Her husband took her unconscious hand and pressed it in his own. He sat down close to the bed, and did not turn his eyes from the suffering form of his wife, waiting anxiously for some sign of recognition. I was in the room, and looked with sadness on these two beings whom death seemed to be separating before they were really united; and yet I could not refrain from hope; it seemed to me that the drama could not end thus.

M. de Vaudreuil, without losing the power of suffering, had lost that of accounting to himself for his feelings. Black clouds were gathering from all points of his horizon to overwhelm him with their intolerable weight; but he did not see them, and, without knowing the cause, he felt his breathing oppressed, and heart-rending thoughts lowering upon him. Several hours passed in solemn silence. The doctor had returned to stay the night at the castle. After having attentively examined his patient, he retired, saying he was to be called if the least change took place.

The Marquis sent away all the attendants, and established himself as watch over his wife. When he was alone, and by the faint light of the lamp contemplated that room, and the bed where she lay whom he had so fondly loved, his mind, which had been stunned, as it were, with the idea "she is in danger," recovered all its restless activity, and turned against himself with fury. The present, with its terrible menace, was not sufficient: he went back to the past,—to his own conduct; and, for

the first time in his life, his soul was pierced with real remorse. It is true that at many times he had taken for remorse certain feelings of shame, embarrassment, and regret; but these were the suggestions of his heart or his imagination, and had nothing to do with his conscience. He remembered what the Marchioness had said to him that morning—"I can suffer up to a certain point; but that point is passed." Had not he been the cause of this excess of suffering? And if that frail life were soon to end, should he not bitterly, terribly reproach himself? Awful anticipation! O that he could recall the past, and surround with care and love the being whom his angry pride had made him so neglect! Alas! those long days of wrong stood before him, staring him in the face. In vain he struggled with the recollection, and would fain have remodelled the past; but the terrible accusers stood their ground!

Every quarter of an hour the solemn voice of the castle clock was heard. This was the only noise that broke upon the silence of the night, and at each vibration of the monotonous sound, M. de Vaudreuil trembled; for it seemed to him that Time in its awful flight cried to him—"It is irreparable!" With the first grief there is always a feeling of astonishment mingled, for we do not quite know what the strange guest wants with us. It is the same in the first visit of remorse. There is something so new in self-accusation—in the bringing down of this proud self, to whose exaltation so much has been sacrificed, that for a moment surprise suspends the intense pain of such a discovery.

Divided between anxiety and remorse, M. de Vaudreuil

passed the greater part of the night a prey to his reflections. At last, to divert himself a little from his miserable thoughts, he took from the table a writing-book which lay there. He opened it, and on the first page read as follows :—

“I have written enough for myself, my beloved; I will henceforth write for you. I do not wish to keep from you any part of my life or thoughts; and since a fatal barrier is now raised between us, I wish that, at least, after my death, you should find here all that you may then regret not having known. It will be difficult, my friend, for me now to meet death. To quit life, supported by your tenderness, would have been easy to me. The link which united our souls would have survived death, and, though become invisible to your eyes, I should have been not the less in communion with you. But to die, deprived of all tokens of your affection! Ah! Victor, may God preserve me from such a fate! And yet it is this which now menaces me. May you, my beloved, not be too much overwhelmed when you read these lines. I know that you cannot read them with indifference. How could the past, thus rendered present to you, not be affecting? I only fear that it may be too much for you, for I mean to tell you all. How could I describe the solitary and exiled life which you have caused me to lead, and omit sufferings of which you have been the author? I shall not omit them then; but first let me assure you of this: I feel no bitterness in my thoughts of you. You are so much more unhappy than I am, that I forget your faults; but I pray God earnestly that He will shew them to you” —

M. de Vaudreuil stopped; it did not seem right for him to read more; besides, his emotion was too great to allow him to continue. What then, while he was so cruelly estranged from her, did she still think of him with tenderness? His own conduct appeared to him the most revolting ingratitude; and, hiding his face in his hands, tears of bitter repentance, without hope, without consolation, streamed from his eyes. If she were to be taken from him, taken before he could obtain pardon! If his accents of sorrow and love should never reach his wife's ears! If she were to leave him without knowing that she was beloved! O God! one ray, one ray of consciousness that she might pardon him! After long exhaustion, she had fallen into a heavy sleep; if this sleep were to end in death!

He approached the bed softly; she still slept. Her expression was serene, and at moments there was shed over her countenance a light of joy, such as beatific visions give. It was morning, the lamp was gone out, and the sun timidly tried to force his way through the curtains. The Marquis stood motionless; he scarcely dared to breathe, for he was frightened at the long sleep, and feared to break it. She half-opened her eyes, closed them, and opened them again; then seeing her husband, extreme agitation overspread her features.

"I have slept too long," she said, in a scarcely audible voice. "Are the horses there? I shall be ready; let us go."

"You cannot go, my beloved, you are ill."

"Ah! it is true," she replied; "I had forgotten."

Her eyes closed again, but suddenly opening them,

and much disturbed, she would have taken her husband's hand; but her weakness prevented her, and her arm sank on the bed-cover.

"You are going then alone?" she asked, fearfully.

"I leave you, my beloved? Oh! never, never more."

"Your words are sweet," she said; "but my eyes are confused, and I cannot see your face. Is your look as tender as your voice?"

"O my beloved wife! can you doubt it?"

"It is so long since I have seen your eyes rest on me with love, that I scarcely remember. Open the curtains that I may see again."

"Yes," said he, falling on his knees beside her, and covering her hand with kisses, "yes, it is long; for selfish and proud thoughts had crushed the tenderness due to you. But all is changed. Ah! you do not know what I have suffered during this long night. You do not know how bitterly I have reproached myself—how humiliated I feel that your pure and noble convictions have so long estranged me from you! If I did not fear to agitate you, how much I could say to you! O my beloved! can you pardon me?"

She was so happy to hear him speak thus—too happy for her strength, for she fainted without being able to utter a word. When she recovered, her eyes sought her husband's, and she made an effort to speak to him. The Marquis prevented her, for it was absolutely necessary to keep her quiet.

"I can understand you without words," he said. "If you really pardon me, my beloved, give me a sign, and I shall be satisfied."

She gathered up all her strength, took her husband's hand and laid it on her heart; then placing her finger on her lips, she closed her eyes and lay quite motionless.

She had pardoned him, but could he pardon himself? He had longed for this consolatory sign, in the hope that the burden which oppressed him would be immediately removed, and the burden remained. It was not only anxiety that troubled him—it was remorse. His last illusion was dissipated, lost for ever. He now saw himself as he was; how could he bear the sight? He was beset by it, and his reflections plunged him into an abyss of grief.

What a solemn moment in his life! Should he try to reconcile himself to this reality, and grow accustomed to knowing himself so far below what he wished to be? or should he, confessing himself undone and in despair, seek at last the true balm for so many sorrows? There is no state of dejection deeper than that of the man who knows his misery, and is content to bear it. There is no higher dignity than that of the man who, knowing the evil and the remedy, has recourse to the only true Physician.

The two roads were before him; good and evil were struggling for their prey.

CHAPTER X.

MADAME DE VAUDREUIL's illness caused us much alarm, and kept us in the most painful suspense. Her husband watched over her with the most devoted care. For weeks he scarcely left her room. Morning, noon, and night, there he sat beside her, silent and almost motionless, that he might not disturb her, and watching for the slightest indications of pain or amendment. This life might appear uniform; but how troubled, how stormy was the current under the apparently monotonous surface! What conflicting feelings! What tumultuous thoughts! Fearful anxiety and bitter repentance, followed by despondency and dread of the future, even if his wife should be restored to him, for he would be himself no more.

One blot on a man's reputation is enough to prevent him ever recovering the place he once occupied in public opinion. To a delicate mind, jealous of its own purity, the consciousness even of once having stepped aside from the right path, is sufficient to dissipate self-delusion. Such is our misery, that often we require evident, palpable proofs, from which we cannot turn our eyes, before we are conscious of it. The evidence of daily life is not

enough; we are so accustomed to this, that we do not see it. It is only after a fall, and from the bottom of the abyss, that some of us perceive the summit of the mountain, and find how low down is the path we had imagined so high.

One day, when the Marchioness was better, and lying on a couch near the fire, M. de Vaudreuil entered, holding in his hand a letter from M. de Chambrie. He gave it to his wife; and while she was reading it, he walked up and down the room, looking very dejected. His reflections were not of a nature likely to cheer his spirits. For some time past, M. de Chambrie had been writing letter after letter, begging of him to come to Paris. His friends were waiting for him, wanting his assistance, and such prolonged delays threatened to endanger the success of his plans. The Marquis read these letters carelessly, and did not even answer them. Their contents concerned him so little now, and appeared so vain! For action, man requires an object, and he had none left. He no longer esteemed himself enough to do anything with a view to his own advancement, and no other ideas had as yet entered his thoughts.

When Madame de Vaudreuil had read the letter, she asked him how he meant to reply. He took the paper, crumpled it in his hands, and threw it behind the fire.

"Oh!" he said, "the idol is fallen; there is no need now to erect a temple."

M. de Vaudreuil, not wishing to engage his wife in conversation, which in her present weak state might fatigue her, left the room. As he passed through the vestibule, he saw the door open, and went out on the

steps. The sun had set some time, and myriads of stars shone on the cloudless sky. It was one of those clear, cold nights in January, when the heavens are so imposing. The Marquis went out into the park to take a more extended survey. His measured step spoke of peaceful contemplation, rather than of restlessness ; and, looking at the hosts of mysterious stars, which, in perfect harmony, revolve through space with solemn majesty, he felt, in face of this vast creation, his own insignificance. What are these infinite worlds ? Why does each accomplish its astonishing revolution ? What is going on in those unknown spheres, and what are the interests and passions which reign amongst the inhabitants. I know nothing more imposing than such a glorious night, nor anything that gives a higher idea of what should be the soul's constant admiration of supreme beauty. We are struck, as we contemplate the heavens, with the consciousness of the sublime poetry of the course of these brilliant planets—eternally the same. With what harmony they move ! Their inequality in brilliance and magnitude makes no difference to the submission with which all follow the course traced out for them. Each one preserves its place, fulfils its part, and contributes to the perfection of the Divine work.

Alas, our poor world ! how sad and mean it appears amidst all this splendour !—stained on all sides, is it not unworthy of the rank in which God's goodness preserves it ? and is there not a grievous contrast between the heavenly course which it accomplishes as in the time of its innocence, and the struggles, and discords, and sorrows of which it is the theatre ? May I be allowed to say that

it reminds me of one of those inconsistent unbelievers, who, while going through the forms of devotion, honour God outwardly, but deny Him in their hearts?

M. de Vaudreuil's thoughts became darker as they crowded upon him one after another. His long habit of dwelling upon himself had shewn him that there was no perfect and fundamental order in his mind, nor in his conduct. On the contrary, in his path through life, what vain flights, what sudden haltings, and what precipitate backward steps had been his! He was deeply grieved, as now, for the first time, he sounded the depths of the abyss. What! this poor self, once so flattered, so caressed, who was to be raised above others, to whom altars were to be built, and for whom the most exquisite incense was a thing too vile—this self so tenderly loved, for whom so much was sacrificed, is now found to be full of corruption, worthy only to be dragged in the dust, insulted and abused without mercy!

And yet, if we do not come to this—if we persist in believing in human perfection—if our ideal is lost in the real, the bitterest tears are not bitter enough for our misfortune. What! must we be reduced to call good, this poor composition of pride and selfishness which constitutes our soul? Then might we well despair. The high idea I have of goodness—the ardent hope of one day attaining to it, the image of nature transformed,—must I bring these down to the level of what I see in myself every day? No, no; better believe in my own inadequacy than lose my ideal; better be steeped in humiliation at the knowledge of the miserable fact, than live in hopeless pride. Oh! if we

were sure of restoration, with what consolation should we look into the abyss of our misery!

I met the Marquis, as I was returning rather late from a walk to the village. Seeing him look so unhappy, I feared the Marchioness might be worse.

"She is well," he said, quickly, as one who would appear neither troubled nor absent.

"I am very glad, for your anxious look alarmed me."

"There are other thoughts besides that one, to bring clouds across the brow."

There was in M. de Vaudreuil's manner a sort of friendliness that contrasted strongly with his general behaviour. I was touched by it, and could not help saying to him—

"There are thoughts that bring peace; why not rather seek them?"

He smiled sadly, saying—

"At your age the heart is pure—everything is easy."

He offered me his arm, and we walked in silence. Till now he had never seemed to notice my existence, and had taken so little count of me, that my presence had never been any restraint upon him, nor my absence astonished him. It was only since his wife's illness that I had acquired worth in his eyes. The care I bestowed upon the Marchioness pleased him, and he shewed his gratitude by unusual attention. I was sensible of the goodness which he manifested towards me. When a superior mind has to fulfil little duties, there is a sort of simple incapability about the effort, reminding one of the graceful attempts of little children, and, like them, affecting.

After we had walked some time in silence—

"M. de Chambrie gives me good news of his son," said the Marquis, trying to be agreeable to me. "I like Gaston very much. He has a frank and happy disposition. Alas! one is worth so much more at five-and-twenty than later in life."

"Do you think, then, that in ten years" —

"Yes; there is in the soul a certain delicacy, a bloom, which fades with advancing years. Once fallen, there are no errors into which one may not be led."

"If it were so," I said, "life would be too sad. I would rather think, that in falling the blossom gives place to the fruit."

"Yes, certainly to the bitter fruit of experience. In early youth, the heart is full of a world of delusions. What is there we will not do? where will we not go? But afterwards, we discover that all these noble bursts of enthusiasm are like the deceitful verdure that covers a deep morass."

"But this discovery does not make things worse."

"Perhaps not; but the disappointment it causes is an effectual check to all enthusiasm. Ah! if we could only preserve our youthful confidence in ourselves—in our own strength and excellence!"

"Well, monsieur, since we spoke of Gaston, I can assure you that the generosity and ardour that you admire in him do not proceed from any self-delusions. Far from this, for I heard him say one day, that to be undeceived about oneself, when one is already undeceived about many things, is the best means of reviving in oneself a thousand flames we had thought extinguished. 'It is by self,' he said, 'that we hold most firmly to the earthly.

When we can sever this link, the soul recovers the power of soaring towards higher regions, and of embracing the good which we need to realise here below.' ”

“ So,” said the Marquis, “ Gaston thinks that self-disenchantment is not the definite point where we are to stop, after all other disenchantments, but a last step of the ladder which we must descend, if we hope to rise higher again ? ”

“ Yes, and much higher than the point from which we set out.”

To rise again ! yes, certainly, that is the question. Indeed there is no other. It is the problem of every man's life, and of society, and of the whole of humanity. To rise again ! is that possible ? or are we condemned for ever to see with horror and disgust the evils of our nature, and submit to them ? We hear of the punishment of some unhappy beings, who, still alive, were fastened to dead bodies. Shall this punishment be ours ? Must the noble instincts of our hearts, our pure aspirations, our elevated thoughts, be for ever chained down, and restrained by depraved tastes, by the evil within us ? While M. de Vaudreuil sought only to satisfy his desires after the true, the beautiful, and the good, he failed, because egotism and pride—those two forms of self-love—kept the entrance of his heart firmly closed against the one great Love, which alone can satisfy all our wants. This barrier had fallen. He now saw the great misery, the absolute nakedness of the soul without God. There are intellects that can measure this abyss, mock at it, and resign themselves to it ; but to M. de Vaudreuil, conscience had spoken ; and mockery does not appease the

conscience. He was calm, however, though sorrowful and dejected. He had a vague feeling that to know and deplore his misery was the first step towards amendment. He did not believe in any restoration, and yet there were impressions in his heart that could only be explained by hope. Till now, he had worshipped goodness in himself—he worshipped it still, but in God. The name of God awoke inexpressible emotion in his breast. The little he knew of God, we might think would have inspired him with fear, but he felt none. The reasonings of his mind, his experience, making manifest to him evil, sorrow, the incompleteness of destiny, the absence of succour and remedy, would all, we might think, have irritated him as formerly against One who permitted such misery. But it was not so. On the contrary, he was glad to turn his eyes away from himself to rest them on Perfection. He did not clearly discern this perfection, nor fully understand its depth and marvellous effects; but he began to feel the incomprehensible love of God, and already experienced what soon would become joy. God manifests Himself to the heart at first indistinctly; He causes His presence to be felt, even before the soul knows whose touch it is that gives so thrilling a vibration to all her chords. She feels at peace, happy and satisfied, before she has fully learned to know the Reconciler.

M. de Vaudrouil spoke little of what was passing within him. His meditations were of that private and sacred order that requires silence. Afterwards, when opinions are more settled, and when they are sufficiently developed to influence every action, to speak becomes a necessity. The soul must communicate the fire that burns within

her ; and this is so much easier, because she has not to go to the sanctuary for the sacred fire ; it is everywhere ; within us, the whole edifice is in flames.

Notwithstanding his reserve, there was in the whole behaviour of M. de Vaudreuil something that announced a great change. His wife remarked it with joy. She returned to life and happiness, under her husband's watchful care. She anticipated a new phase in their mutual relations ; and the sorrowful past daily lost reality in her memory. Was not the day at hand, when she would enjoy again, with M. de Vaudreuil's love, that perfect union of hopes and sentiments which had once charmed her heart ? When such blessings have once been enjoyed, it is hard to do without them. How can we describe the felicity which rushes into the heart with the hope of returning affection ? Alas ! there are many whose love never returns !

Towards the spring, Maurice d'Ermont came to spend some days at Vieilcastel. This young man, perhaps naturally inclined to devotion, had allowed himself for some years past to be entirely influenced by M. de Vaudreuil. He had followed him afar, through the different phases of his opinions, more through feebleness, and a natural habit of imitation, than from any real necessity of his mind. And as, in truth, he understood very little of the questions which agitated the Marquis, he ended by falling into a state of vague and senseless exaltation. He lived in the clouds, but did not find himself at home there. M. de Vaudreuil, who had often felt his company a burden, yet received him with much kindness, and spoke to him with more freedom than to us.

They went out together one morning. It was in the month of April; a green tint began to appear on the lower branches, announcing the quick return of many departed pleasures, of many banished impressions. There was something so fresh, so full of new life in this delicate shade!

As they walked, the two friends came to the village church. They entered almost unconsciously. It was the hour of mass, and the organ mingled its deep tones with the voices of the children who composed the choir. The aisles resounded, and the humble church presented an image of repose and holiness. M. de Vaudreuil and Maurice advanced silently, and stood listening to the music. Maurice was much affected. I know not what reminiscences of youth rushed to his mind. His eyes rested with tenderness on a picture representing the Virgin and Child. He was overcome by the poetry of the scene and the music. An old woman offered him her book. He took it, fell on his knees, and remained for some time absorbed in his emotion. The service drew to a close, the congregation retired one by one, and the church was left desolate.

"Maurice," said the Marquis, softly, "we are here alone; will you not come away?"

They went out slowly, and walked a long way without speaking; very different feelings occupied the two friends. At the summit of the hill, Maurice turned to look once more at the tower of the rustic church.

"Excuse my weakness," he said, "some lingering affection makes me still sensible to the beauty of the ceremonies of religion. I have separated from it with regret, overcome by the strength of your arguments, your

raillery, and your powerful reasons, which conquered the natural bent of my heart."

"Alas!" said M. de Vaudreuil, "you possessed a refuge and I have robbed you of it! Your heart belonged to that Christ I admire, and I forced you to deny Him! You looked to Him for that pardon which every man needs, and the restoration we all sigh for; and I snatched away your hopes, and led you to a region where the north wind blows incessantly!"

"Ah!" replied Maurice, "how I wish that your reasonings might lead you back to religion! The mind becomes so weary, so empty, in the pursuit of a good never to be attained. Religion at least soothes and calms us; her ceremonies enchant us, and the emotions she inspires satisfy our hearts. Do you think we shall never return?"

"I do not know, Maurice, what you will do. For myself, I can never return to the Church. We cannot come back to what we have so absolutely rejected. But this does not imply, that because men have disfigured truth, truth shall never dawn upon me. Because I reject the false forms of religion upon which men's minds are divided, can I never attain to the religion my soul needs? Shall the problem of life never be solved for me? Ah! believe me, Maurice, true conclusions must be far more consolatory than those with which human religions would seek to content us. The divorce between God and His creature is not irremediable. Creation cannot be abandoned by its Author, and from age to age depart further from Him; society cannot go on corrupting itself—man remain the plaything of evil, and be eternally opposed

as a rival and an adversary to the supreme good. Some time, order must be established, evil exterminated, and sorrow, the counterpoise of sin, which God has in His wisdom thrown into the balance, to prevent the world from falling, be banished with its cause."

"But," asked Maurice, "where is the pledge, where the promise of this restoration? How, as you yourself said not long ago, can we take our hopes for promises, or our desires for the designs of God?"

"Ah! I know," replied M. de Vaudreuil, "for such a glorious victory over evil, there must be a new fact, a great achievement, as great as the first, deep in its consequences, coming from God Himself. The reveries of cold reasoners, the miserable despair of some philosophers, cannot produce such results; nor the convulsions of timid devotion, nor the weak and repeated repentance of chosen souls; for universal evil we must have a universal remedy—a thought from God, to reattach to Himself the work first created by His thought. Does this remedy not exist? To the fall, the awful fall, has God opposed nothing? If man has so violently departed from the path of nature, in order to fall into the abyss, why should not God do the same to raise His creature?"

"Is this really your opinion?" Maurice asked, with astonishment.

M. de Vaudreuil, drawn on by the desire of consoling his friend, had gone beyond, if not his conviction, yet the conviction which he allowed to himself. He felt heavily his responsibility towards this soul which he had troubled.

"Do not consult me," he said, "I know very little; but what should prevent you searching for yourself, and seek-

ing if you can find in Christ satisfaction for all your wants—consolation for all your sorrows ?”

“ But,” said Maurice, “ if you know what we ought to think of Christ, why do you not tell me ?”

“ I repeat to you, every one should seek for himself,” said the Marquis, in a tone which imposed silence on his friend.

Christ ! Yes, certainly He is the key to human destiny. M. de Vaudreuil began to see it. His heart began to commune with Him who reconciles earth and heaven. God and man are face to face : God just and holy, condemning sin by His own perfection ; man, miserable, destitute, and given up to sin which God condemns. Christ Jesus appears. He fills up the gulf. He manifests God to man. He teaches him that God is love, that He is our Father ; that instead of taking vengeance in the death of the sinner, He exercises at once His love and His power, by changing man, and taking away the sin of the world. His life, His death, His glorious resurrection, proclaim pardon and restoration. Christ ! He satisfies the creature, in restoring to him His God ; He satisfies God, in bringing back to Him His creature. This is not a vain idea, tearing the veil from the cause of our misery without healing it ; it is a great fact opposed to the fact of our fall. Ah ! let us love this Jesus, since His love alone can fill the void in our hearts. Let us love Him in His exaltation ; let us love Him in His humility. Alas ! both are denied by men. Some cannot understand the obscure and sorrowful life in which Christ was set forth as our example, and in which He reveals Himself to our hearts in His sufferings, while God is revealed to us in His compassion. Others

fail to perceive the infinite extension of His work. They see in the Redeemer, the Saviour only of some—the inexorable Judge of all.

O Christ ! Thou perfect Reconciler between God and all mankind, the Restorer of unity,—Thou who wouldst not that a single being in all creation escape Thy mercy, offending God irretrievably, and persisting in sin,—Thou who wouldst not have a single blot in the universe, not a single sorrow without its fruits, permit not Thy creatures to be longer ignorant of Thee.

O Christ ! I know that Thou canst renew the heart, without teaching it to spell every letter of Thy name. Thou requirest not of the poor soul Thou wouldst regenerate, that he should be able to reduce to system Thy designs of love. The greatest errors of the mind may subsist with entire devotion to Thee. Thy creatures may outrage Thee by imperfect notions of Thy mercy, and yet love Thee, and follow Thee wherever thou dost lead. But, O my Saviour ! how many souls are kept at a distance from Thee by the scaffolding raised by different forms of religion, to hide Thee from Thy people ! and to them who do discern Thee, what consolation is wanting, and what a false idea they give of Thy love, when they sorrowfully confess that there are some evils for which Thou hast no cure—some wants for which Thou hast no answer !

O Christ, the Saviour of the world ! I prostrate myself before Thee, and from the depths of my heart conjure Thee at last to reveal Thyself to this age, which thirsts after Thee, but knows Thee not !

Book the Third.

CHAPTER I.

SEVERAL months had passed away. Already the woods were tinged with autumnal hues. The red and yellow leaf mingled with the green foliage ; the dry branch stretched out its bare form beside boughs full of life ; all around, our eyes were greeted with the remains of past magnificence and faded splendour. As in the preceding year, our thoughts were directed to our approaching journey to Paris. I was anxiously waiting for the day of departure. Gaston had been to see us during the summer ; and while he was with us, it was settled that I should give him my hand the following winter.

One evening, at that hour when night claims from day her waning empire, Madame de Vaudreuil was with her husband on the balcony, watching the western sky grow pale after a gorgeous sunset. The shadows of twilight darkened the landscape, the moist air was balmy with evening perfumes, and the moon was rising high in the

heavens. All nature was tranquil; save when some faint sound was heard, such as makes one feel the universal silence, the fall of a leaf, the sigh of the evening breeze, or the distant echo of human life,—these alone intruded upon the grand monotony of the scene.

“Victor,” said the Marchioness, “I feel myself now in harmony with this peaceful Nature. I have long understood only her storms and her festivals, but now I can enter into her repose.”

“Her festivals?” repeated M. de Vaudreuil.

“Yes, I understood them. There are for all minds, especially for the suffering mind, moments of enthusiasm, when, rising above self, we love life, because it comes from God—we love sorrow, because it leads to God—we love our desolation, because God will minister to it. I remember certain days in spring, when all creation broke out into a hymn of joy, and I joined in the concert of praise with indescribable delight. Evenings like this I feared, because they made me sad. I knew nothing of the soothing influence of calm upon the troubled waters of life.”

“And yet,” said he, “how great is its influence! Calm!—that is, the soul self-possessed; the soul no longer beat about by contrary winds, but coming full sail into port.”

“Oh, my beloved,” she replied, with emotion, “do you remember the time when, in the bitterness of your heart, you compared yourself to the *Abbadona* of the poet? Now, you have heard the voice calling—‘*Abbadona*, come to thy Redeemer!’ And joy is come down into your heart, for you have found your God!”

“And you, my beloved, have I not found you also?”

Are we not come to that rendezvous you promised me, when you said, in accents that pierced my soul—"Go away ; raise barriers between us ; but one day we shall meet again !" Now we are united ! Do not they understand one another who are united by the same love, the same confidence ? I feel that your life is mine. Our eyes are directed to Christ ; they meet in Him."

"You make me love life too much."

"And why not love it ? The higher the point from which we view it, the more we appreciate its worth, and rejoice in its beauty."

"Yes ; but it is a serious, almost a solemn joy, and does not secure us from suffering."

"It teaches us," replied M. de Vaudreuil, "to use suffering as an auxiliary, and not repulse it as an enemy."

"But why do we talk of suffering ?" she asked ; "are we not happy ?"

"It is perhaps an old habit—a last echo of the past."

"Or rather the prelude to the future."

"My beloved, are not our hearts united ? What henceforth can separate them ?"

"Ah ! Victor, since nothing in life can separate them, death itself will not break the tie between us."

She said these words with emotion, and leant her head on her husband's shoulder. M. de Vaudreuil turned anxiously towards his wife. There was so much repose in her features—so much animation in her eye, never had the Marchioness appeared so full of life.

"We have been ambitious in our happiness," she said, after a moment's silence. "So many powerful ties, to be united by the least of which many people would consider

themselves happy: the similarity of our characters, of our tastes, our mutual affection, the conformity of our desires and wishes, have not been enough for us. We have sought for more, and we have found it."

"Yes," said he, "and we were right to seek much. If little is enough for trifling minds, or rather if they think that little suffices them, it is not so with those who look at life seriously. They require much; they want all goodness and all happiness—all truth and all perfection—all love and all unity,—that is to say, God, and in God His creatures. Is this asking too much? Is it wrong—is it a misfortune to cherish such aspirations? I think not. It is right for the soul to be ambitious; her glory consists in not being satisfied. I know nothing so degrading as a low estimate of happiness."

"You are right," said the Marchioness; "and if any reproach is due, I do not mean only to common minds, but even to those aspiring ones, ardent and full of feeling, whom the world calls romantic, perhaps foolish, it is generally for requiring too little. And yet, both the world accuses them, and they themselves are for ever dissatisfied, because they strive, forsooth, after impossibilities."

"Impossible! irreparable! These are empty, senseless words now—vain, deceitful words!"

"Ah! Victor, I would that many men might see, as you did, life in its miserable, naked truth; then they would seek and find, as you have done, that which completes it so wonderfully."

I was walking in the park; and as I drew near to the castle, I saw Madame de Vaudreuil and her husband on

the balcony. The moon shone full upon them ; and such a peaceful, noble expression reigned over their countenances, that I stood still to look at them. They seemed to be raised above the evils and difficulties of life. You would have said they had conquered all these, and that now, left peaceful possessors of the field of battle, they were looking back with complaisance on the scene of their struggles and labours.

They perceived me in the shade where I stood, smiled kindly, and leaning forward, looked down on me with that sympathy we so gladly bestow on others, when we ourselves are rising on the wings of happiness. It was a look whose tempered brilliancy shewed that they drew not their ardour from what they contemplated, but from some inward, secret inspiration.

The autumn advanced. The summits of the mountains became bare and dreary—the evenings bright and cold ; and the sun, reappearing after the equinoctial storms, brought us only uncertain warmth, and the adieus of the departing season. The moment of our departure at last arrived.

The wind blew strong from the heights, raising in the air clouds of dead leaves from under the horses' feet ; signs of decay were all around. The road was broken up in many places, through the violence of the autumnal rains ; and the loose earth, washed away by the waters into the plain, crushed the modest mountain heath.

Madame de Vaudreuil looked with emotion on the country that had so long been a witness of her griefs and her joys. At a turn of the road, Vieilcastel once more appeared to us in all its beauty, half concealed by a light

transparent mist. She looked at it tenderly, then closing her eyes, and leaning back in the carriage—

“It is gone, then,” she said.

Alas ! yes, it was gone. More tears still in this beautiful retreat, but no more happiness !

After some days of travelling, we arrived at Paris towards nightfall. The rapid pace of the horses through the labyrinths of narrow streets and long avenues, the noise of the wheels on the pavement, and the light of the lamps, all bewildered me. I ceased to distinguish the objects around me, and when at last the carriage stopped before the steps in the vast court of M. de Vaudreuil's hotel, I know not what possessed me, but in alighting I slipped, and fell awkwardly into the half-opened arms of Gaston. M. de Lussac was much displeased with me, and drew my arm within his, and we entered the house.

The next morning, when I was alone in the drawing-room, M. de Beaugency was announced. The expression of curiosity on his face, contrasting with the nonchalance of his manners, and the extreme care he took of his personal appearance, struck me immediately. It was evident that he was much interested in us.

When he parted from us at Vieilcastel, a year before, he left M. de Vaudreuil a prey to personal ambition, and the Marchioness wretched, because of her husband's indifference. He expected now to find his friend disgusted with himself, and with life ; and being generally correct in his predictions, he piqued himself upon his power of foresight.

As soon as he entered, and I saw him fix his penetrating eye on me, as though he would read the depths of my

heart, I, who could read his so plainly, was seized with an irresistible desire to rival him in raillery. Whenever he addressed a question to any one, he expected in the reply to meet with some proof of human misery. He thought he might safely put himself in the position of a man who discovers another in the act of committing himself. The corners of his mouth bespoke it; but his dull and sad, though not melancholy eyes, expressed no indignation. We had already had some skirmishes in the Pyrenees.

"Here is my enemy," he said, as soon as he saw me.

"Under arms, monsieur."

"Lay down your arms, and allow me the honour of congratulating you."

"On what account, pray?"

"Am I indiscreet? Is it too soon? I was told of a marriage ——"

"It is true; but if any one is to be congratulated, it is surely Gaston."

"Both of you."

"No, only Gaston. Do you not know that I am undeceived?"

"You do not look as if you were."

"Ah! monsieur. Marriage!—what is marriage? Some days, some months, perhaps, of imaginary happiness; then disagreements, quarrels, and fruitless efforts after reconciliation."

Without appearing to do so, M. de Beaugency listened to me attentively, hoping to draw something out of my words.

"How is Madame de Vaudreuil?" he asked, as if this question were the natural result of what I had just said.

"You will find her so much changed, that you will scarcely know her."

"Is she very pale—very weak?"

"No, monsieur."

"Is she more sad than ever?"

"Not exactly," I said, with a malicious air; "but you shall judge for yourself."

I was going on, but saw he was not listening; he had sunk into one of the largest, most comfortable arm-chairs, and appeared to be deep in thought.

"It is certain," he said, at last; "it is certain that Madame de Vaudreuil is singularly enthusiastic. I have told her so often, but she pays no attention. It is impossible that she should not be unhappy."

"It would be ridiculous if she were so," I replied; "for her husband is perfectly devoted to her, and he is so happy himself."

My companion looked at me with astonishment. Was I jesting, or had his predictions turned out wrong?

"M. de Vaudreuil is not at all in the state of mind you suppose him to be," I added, without being in the least disconcerted, "nor his wife either. You are wrong in your suppositions;" and I laughed gaily.

The assurance with which I spoke, surprised M. de Beaugency. He feared he had been mistaken, and so unusual a circumstance almost gave him pain. He begged me to go and see if the Marchioness knew of his being there.

"I shall do no such thing," I replied; "you are at my mercy now. You know nothing, and have lost the track; but I know even the most fleeting shades in the characters of your friends."

M. de Beaugency was too much master of himself to shew impatience. He answered me with an incredulous smile, and then seemed to be intent on studying me, while waiting for Madame de Vaudreuil.

"Monsieur," said I, "are you as conversant with nature as with mankind?"

He took this for a piece of railleury, and replied ironically—"I am sure you would surpass me there, as everywhere else. It cannot be more difficult for you to unravel the mysteries of nature than to read so fluently in M. de Vaudreuil's mind."

"Well," I replied, "never mind my sagacity. I merely wished to ask you if you had ever observed two beautiful swans, sailing across the clear water towards the shore; or two noble steeds in the same course, rivals in fleetness; or, indeed, have you ever remarked on the summit of the mountain which overlooks Vieilcastel, the two isolated fir-trees which command the whole country? The valley is often hid from them by thick clouds, while the heaven above is perfectly clear. The sun's rays gild their trunks, while the angry storm rages beneath. Or have you——"

The door opened, and Madame de Vaudreuil entered, followed by her husband. I looked at M. de Beaugency, and to conclude my sentence, made a gesture of my hand towards the two just entering the room. He could see at once whether or not I was right in the impressions I gave him. The Marchioness, indeed, was no longer the same being he had left her,—overcome by sorrow, weak, and with one foot, as it seemed, already in the grave; now full of life and smiles. I saw him cast down his eyes when she entered, as though he were struck by the unusual bril-

liancy of her's, and the gentle majesty of her look. Her beauty, truly, was dazzling. She looked younger than she really was ; and at the first glance, the simple confidence, and generous freedom of her expression, were alone discerned. A superficial observer might have thought her's the beauty of youth, in all its pride and charming freshness of triumph before the struggle ; but on a closer view, her sweet smile, so full of meaning, told of experience in life ; it was not from ignorance of its sorrows that she looked on it so kindly.

M. de Vaudreuil was not less changed. His features still spoke of passion and irony, and his manners were still characterised by the same strange mixture of refined politeness and careless *brusquerie*. In his language, there was a freedom, that sometimes led him to eloquence, and sometimes to the use of short and cutting expressions ; but all those different qualities seemed reconciled now by some new and powerful agent. Harmony presided over the contrast. It was plain that all was subdued to the will.

After the exchange of all the little trifling politenesses which people make use of on meeting after a long absence, M. de Vaudreuil said—"Jeanne and I have just been going over reminiscences of past days. They have deprived us of many joys, and have brought us many also. It is a solemn account to take."

"The past is sorrowful to look back upon," remarked M. de Beaugency ; "so much the more sad, as it predicts the future. We must not dwell too long upon it."

"And why not ?" said the Marchioness, "when the past, once sad, has brought us to a delightful present,—it is no longer painful to look back. The contrast heightens

the joy; and the promise for the future appears much more charming, when we compare it with less happy days."

"You think, then," said M. de Beaugency, with a slight smile, "that all your sorrows are in the past?"

"It would be too much to say all," she replied: "but all the most bitter and insupportable ones are behind me. Are you sorry to see me happy?"

"No; say that you are happy, if it gives you pleasure. But for myself, when I see two springs in the year, I will believe there may be two in life."

"Ah, believe it, my friend!" replied the Marquis. "God has so created man, that there is no sentiment in him that may not bloom a second time. Love, hope, enthusiasm, and confidence in God, are not designed to charm the morning of life only. Often, indeed, in youth, there is only the appearance of these qualities—and the deceitful spring, in its short duration, only serves to make us long more ardently for the real spring. Ah, my friend, you know not its value! You know not the felicity that springs up in the heart, when it finds all again, after having lost all!"

As he spoke, M. de Vaudreuil looked on his wife so tenderly, so passionately—a look so full of love, that it was easy to see what a change had come over him. M. de Beaugency sank deeper into his arm-chair; with his arms crossed, his head on his shoulder, he coolly listened to his friend.

"Vaudreuil," said he, in the monotonous tone in which he knew how to speak provokingly, "does experience, which leads us from delusion, ever lead us back again?"

"Why," replied the Marquis, "are you for ever hunt-

ing out delusions? Is there really nothing else in the world?"

"In your head, my dear friend, I think not," he replied. And, rising, he took up some books from the table.

The conversation then turned on these works. M. de Beaugency sustained it with much wit; but his thoughts were elsewhere. Interrupting himself suddenly, to resume the subject which interested him—

"My dear Vaudreuil," he said, "are you not greatly changed?"

"That may be."

"I have often observed," continued M. de Beaugency, "that opinions lightly received, and lightly abandoned, easily resume their empire over the mind. But when we renounce our enthusiasm with sorrow and distraction—with struggling efforts and much labour, I did not think it was possible for us to return to it. I pity you, my friend, for having yielded to the yoke afresh. Alas for human misery!"

The relation in which the husband and wife stood to each other was so different to what M. de Beaugency expected, that he was astonished, and his sagacity baffled. He could not understand it, and felt almost scandalised. This impression was renewed each time he saw them. A reconciliation, founded on simple good-will, on reciprocal toleration for opinions which time had modified, a friendship of habit, would have appeared natural enough to him; but there was something more than this between them—a real, true understanding of the heart and mind—a union of sentiment and language. Of that love which is rekindled from its own ashes, stronger, more vigorous

more true than before, he had no idea. He knew by sad experience, that in hearts slowly worn out by ambition, or interest—by grovelling passions, or clever calculations, there is no room for love.

Once, at that age when, after having suffered enthusiasm to grow cold, the heart in its turn grows cold towards the miserable passion that led it astray, he had loved, or rather wished to love. But she whom he chose as the object of his adoration, not having even perceived the love he thought he entertained for her, he had felt no other sorrow than what arose from finding himself incapable of any.

M. de Beaugency had too much penetration not to discover that religious sentiments had had a great share in the change which was accomplished in his friend. Religion to him was the same thing as narrow-mindedness, and servility of heart. He conceived a great contempt for M. de Vaudreuil; and without trying to sound opinions which he condemned altogether, he could not discern the difference between what is usually styled religion, and the consecration of the heart to Him who has filled up the gulf between God and the creature. I cannot wonder at this. It has often happened to me, when I have heard of a man, from mere weariness, taking refuge in devotion, that I have judged his intellect poor, and his character weak; but all change is not weakness; and to acknowledge the great fact of pardon and man's restoration, is surely a sign of elevation of mind—not of inferiority.

Religion! Ah! why is it so disfigured, so degraded by those who pretend to uphold it? Age succeeds age,

and is not sufficient to clear off the rubbish that accumulates on its borders. In reality so simple, how complicated is it rendered ! Love, boundless, unconditional, infinite love is shed abroad, bringing to every creature pardon, like itself boundless, unconditional, infinite ; depositing in the soul the germ of a new life and of justice ; transforming the world—this vast theatre of disorder—into an arena of progress ? What can be greater, holier, or more in accordance with what we know of God ? What more fitted to make us proclaim aloud, that the reality wrought by God's hands is more consoling than our most beautiful illusions—than our most cherished dreams ?

CHAPTER II.

I OFTEN found myself comparing my happiness with Madame de Vaudreuil's : they were so different ! I was below the region of tempests—she was above it. Hence, a certain restlessness was awakened in me. The happiness which comes late to one who has been long deprived of it, is not elating but deeply affecting. The remembrance of the experience which preceded it—the distant vibration of bitter sorrow, and hope deceived, excites in one who stands by and contemplates this dearly-bought happiness a feeling almost akin to compassion.

Madame de Vaudreuil had never been so completely herself. Her mind, from which the most delicate feeling did not exclude the most refined and lively wit, had never before been so prominently brought out. I was astonished at the marvellous union of the highest gifts of the heart and the intellect, and all exercised without restraint. Before, it had been her life, afterwards it was impending death that threw over her a menacing shadow, robbing us each day of some earthly endowment, but shewing more clearly the hope of immortality, and endless love. But now there was a bright interval. Life seemed to have emptied its bitter cup, and, weary of its harshness, to smile

peacefully on her who was soon to escape its fetters. Death, for a time arrested, hesitated to shew his power, and throwing round his victim invisible cords, hid himself for a while, and allowed her to breathe fully the pure life-giving air of happiness.

To have seen her, you would have thought she moved above this life, beyond the reach of its attacks. A calm sublimity pervaded her whole being, such as we sometimes see in the sun as he draws near the end of his course, when his oblique rays penetrate the depth of the forest. There is no sound to disturb the quiet, and Nature seems silently to repose after the fatigues of the day.

Yet sometimes, and I could not understand wherefore, there was a shade of melancholy on Madame de Vaudreuil's brow. Must happiness never be complete on earth? Is one to possess the nearest approach to it—that of loving perfectly, and being perfectly beloved—only to be disturbed by fresh troubles? Is that life? I asked myself these questions with trembling, for I had not yet begun to live seriously enough to know that by the side of boundless happiness there springs up always, in the truly refined mind, a sickness and a loathing when it comes in contact with the evil that desolates the earth.

Whatever may be the reassuring convictions of the mind, there is in the spectacle of the world something which strangely wounds us. The conditions of existence are hard, even when no particular suffering darkens the horizon. The mere fact of life is so austere, that the soul sinks, and is well-nigh overwhelmed at the contemplation of it. The higher and more purified its path, the more unhealthy appears the atmosphere—the more bitter and

grievous the evils of the world. Unable to attain to the perfection which is seen afar off, and adored, there is yet no satisfaction in the feeble attempts made to reach it on earth. To the bitterness of life which is to end in death, is added the misery of an ever-increasing thirst—a thirst after goodness, truth, and God. If the soul possess God—if it be habituated to communion with Him, and to bask and bloom in the rays of Divine love, the contrast becomes still more insupportable.

There is, no doubt, a means of escaping from this sickness of soul; frivolity is its cure; but this renders us incapable of happiness, affording us only a puerile satisfaction, or passive content, which lowers the tone of the mind. True happiness, if it does not make us selfish, makes us feel more acutely how on all sides evil prevents a perfect state of felicity.

For some consolation, God has given us the happiness of affections. Yet many people appear not to care for this gift, either because their souls are too mean to feel the incompleteness of destiny, and their own need of consolation, or because they think themselves strong enough to do without it. Let us beware of making any compromise with happiness; let us strive to obtain all we can. He who knows how to suffer, knows also how to enjoy. He who deprives himself of the one, runs the risk of losing the other.

Without its impairing her happiness or her serenity, Madame de Vaudreuil suffered from this sickness. In the solitude in which she had lived for so many years, she had seen little of the evil that consumes society. Since her return to Paris, her more extended connexions

brought her more in contact with that absence of moral elevation which often degrades the lives of those who are most highly esteemed by the world. Her husband felt something of the same; but instead of being depressed by the contemplation of human misery, he felt excited to action, and to efforts necessary for the remedy of such great evils.

One evening, when I had sat very late reading a book which interested me, M. and Madame de Vaudreuil returned home and came into the drawing-room where I was sitting. She appeared fatigued, and threw herself into an easy chair near the fire. Her expression of countenance contrasted strangely with her dress, which heightened her beauty. She wore on her person the emblems of the pomp of life, and on her features the impress of a soul from which the luxuries of life could not hide the sorrows of existence, nor the supreme delights of the world to come. I was on the point of leaving the room, when the Marquis, approaching his wife, said,

“You are sad to-night.”

“Yes,” she replied, “I am always sad when I have been in the world. I long to love my fellow-creatures, to admire them, and to feel with them! When I am obliged to love them without feeling any admiration, and to pity them without sympathy for them, I feel lonely amongst them.”

“What can be more natural?” he said. “After having understood wherein true grandeur consists, how can we reconcile ourselves to the disorder of this world? It is well for us, my beloved, that we have left Vieilcastel. Alone with nature and the contemplation of our happiness,

there was some danger of selfishness tarnishing the purity of our affection. Here, amidst our fellow-creatures, it will be ennobled and purified; and it becomes a union of devotion and sympathy. Happiness, my dear wife, is the leisure accorded to the soul, to enable it to feel more acutely the misery of humanity. Let us not forget this, nor sink our felicity to the level of mere satisfaction, but raise it into a mission of love and sacrifice."

"Ah!" she said, "I am afraid: to know how to live is to know how to make a choice of sufferings; and happy are we when we love as our most precious treasure those which we have chosen."

"And is it so with you, my beloved?"

"Certainly it is; I would rather suffer from the discord I see between the world and God, than be myself far off from God. Oh! believe me, if sometimes sad thoughts remind me that our true home is not on earth, gratitude, for the most part, fills my heart."

"Truth," replied M. de Vaudreuil, "is too glorious for the soul which perceives it, not to be ravished with it—too bitter, not to be unpleasant—too full of consolation, not to bring reassurance. The contemplation of life under its various aspects, awakens these different sentiments. We admire and we deplore—we weep and we rejoice. This singular contrast is repeated in all earthly things. Magnificent in their origin, degraded by men, but destined to a glorious renovation, it is impossible but that they must awaken in the mind mingled emotions of trouble and joy."

"Victor, tell me the reason of this. Can it be that when I consider the great happiness your tenderness be-

stows on me, I form a high idea of what mine may be to you? Is it, that having endeavoured to fathom the depth of our mutual love, and found neither the end nor the limit, I can better understand the incomparable Love that watches over you and me? But whatever be the reason, when fearful thoughts weigh on my mind, I feel reassured for you. Life will never be too heavy for you."

"To say what you are for me, my beloved, would not be possible in the feeble words of man. Let weak language, the faithful reflection of imperfect feeling, retrace, if it will, affection less intense—passion less deep: our love is beyond earthly expression. Together to belong to God, for time and for eternity—together to suffer the evils of the way—to hope for the blessings of heaven—to love all creatures—to be united for ever, and yet every hour to be united afresh, as if the preceding hour had not witnessed the same union—each to hear, not the vain echo of our own voices, but the sound that completes the note, the note that completes the harmony—to be two, and yet one,—oh, my beloved, this is our lot! Let us not be afraid of troubling our life with labour and struggle; our lot will still be joyful."

"Ah!" she said, "too much suffering is not the danger I fear. The danger is, lest we forget the effort and the sacrifice in the sweetness of our love. And yet, why is this love vouchsafed to us, if not to encourage us to greater efforts and sacrifices?"

"Certainly, my beloved; and let us make use of the repose and security God has given us. We shall understand that happiness is not the end, but that we must

use it to devote ourselves more entirely to God and to mankind."

Madame de Vaudreuil had risen. The expression of her countenance added an affecting charm to her beauty. All the tenderness of love—all the heroism of courage, shone in her eyes. Her husband was touched by it. She went towards him, and he clasped her in his arms with transport. I discovered too late that they had forgotten my presence, and, gently raising the tapestry, I made my escape.

On reaching my room, I fell into a train of thought, and felt something in the depth of my soul, telling me that this serious happiness was true happiness. But as yet I felt quite incapable of it.

The next morning, when I awoke, the January sun was shining on the trees covered with hoar-frost in the garden. I felt on my finger the ring Gaston had given me, and saw on my table a bouquet he had sent to anticipate my awakening. Life appeared to me in its most attractive form—a perpetual fête, and suffering like a bad dream.

CHAPTER III.

It must be confessed that France is loved as no other land is loved. Certainly there are countries whose children are inspired either with that deep, calm admiration which springs from the contemplation of a long course of virtue, or with the compassion awakened by noble misfortune. But, La France! who can tell the *prestige* that belongs to her? To heroism is added grace, which confers harmony on all the other qualities. She can conquer if she chooses; but now she strives to please. With impulses the most impetuous, and with the most rapid, triumphant strides in the march of progress, she has yet sudden weaknesses, precipitate retreats, a feeling of terror awakened at her own audacity, which makes her fly from the difficulties she sought. She has falls, and great ones.

The genius of France is expansive, and its impress is felt all around, even in the smallest details of individual life. There is in the very air of France something in sympathy with all human-kind, something which gives freedom to all the powers of the mind; nothing impedes their growth; no sound fails to awaken its echo. It might be said that France undertakes to unite all the faculties,

and to give them a common centre for a common action. And while, in other countries, some special quality is developed so largely as to prevent others from appearing, France seems particularly desirous of reserving to each the place belonging to it. With that exquisite tact which distinguishes her—her clear perception of proportion and measure, she arrests betimes any exclusive course, and is ready to give place to minds of every stamp.

Such is France !—only more beautiful, more great than I can tell. But what must we think, when, endowed with all these splendid gifts, which have made her the centre of inspiration for the world, she voluntarily descends from the high position she occupied, and yields to mean calculations, and to labours devoid of all greatness? Is her mission at an end? and after ages of glory—after taking the lead among nations, is she destined, for want of the life which conviction only can give, to perish in the undeceiving of herself and the denial of truth?

This question had assailed M. de Vaudreuil since his arrival in Paris. Everything repeated it to him :—the world in which he again lived—the institutions he examined—and literature in its sad decline. He had lived too much the life of the times, ever to lose his interest in them. Indeed, they became more and more interesting to him. His own desires being satisfied, he entered more heartily into the evils of the age, and their possible remedy. Instead of being absorbed by inward agitations, he laid himself out for the good of his generation, often overcome by the sad spectacle of the scepticism paralysing France, often also encouraged by hope for the future, and by projects to be realised.

If anything can make the sight of evil supportable to generous minds, it is the energy with which they strive to repel it. But before acting, we must necessarily measure the breadth and depth of the evil we wish to overcome. It must have touched the heart—cast a shade over the life, and entered deeply into the thoughts. This period of initiation and discovery, so important for the mind, awakening all its powers, does not immediately call forth activity. It is perhaps the hardest time to endure, because its tendency is to dejection and sorrow.

M. de Beaugency observed with extreme interest what was passing in his friend's mind. Perhaps it would be accusing him wrongly to suppose that a secret joy crept into his heart, with the idea that the earnest contemplation of the state of the world might end in disturbing the peaceful happiness which was so incomprehensible to him. Perhaps he did not go so far as to hope to see disappointment seize hold of M. de Vaudreuil, and disgust take the place of compassion. However it might be, he never tried to fathom the religious sentiments of the Marquis. Every tendency of the soul towards God was already condemned by him as chimerical, and caused him a kind of irritation, the only one of which he was capable. The cause of a happiness he despised mattered little to him. What he watched for with anxiety, sharpened by self-love, was the return of his friend to that path which leads downwards instead of upwards, and in which he had seen him walk so long. The acuteness of his mind, which his indifference and commonplace kindness of heart had never destroyed, had full play in the contemplation of a man

of such a warm and generous nature as M. de Vaudreuil, and he felt the loss of this satisfaction.

The Marchioness, too, had lost her charm for him. He had never grudged her her hopes, but he did grudge her her happiness. The only exercise his heart had enjoyed was pity for her, and he knew not how to replace this. In fact, the sight of goodness was repugnant to M. de Beaugency. He could endure it, when sorrow as its result seemed to prove its folly. He could take pleasure, then, in this demonstration, and look with interest on those who were the subjects of it. But goodness leading to happiness, he felt almost as a personal offence. Still he came almost every day to see Madame de Vaudreuil, to observe, converse, and say witty and frivolous things to pass away the time without occupying the mind. There was often a mixture of spleen in his dry remarks, though not enough to call forth reply. His stories were more malicious, and his irony, though less pointed than formerly, wounded more deeply.

"I have just met the Abbé Mervil at Madame de Chambrie's," he said, one morning as he entered the Marchioness's drawing-room.

"One might think you had a particular taste for Abbés, for your face is radiant with pleasure unusual to you."

"It is true, madame," he replied, rubbing his hands with unfeigned delight, "it is true; I have a great esteem for them all, beginning with M. l'Abbé de Lamenais."

"What has the Abbé Mervil been saying to you then?" asked M. de Vaudreuil, his curiosity excited.

"Nothing, nothing at all ; I am not in his confidence ; besides, I scarcely saw him for five minutes ; he was just coming out as I went in."

"And those five minutes sufficed to charm you ?" said the Marchioness.

"Certainly, madame, for he asked about you and M. de Vaudreuil."

M. de Beaugency, who had a habit of fixing his eyes on the fire, or the ceiling, or any other equally interesting object, as if to shew his perfect indifference to what he said, or to what he heard, raised them now, and turned them on the Marquis with an ironical smile ; then, bending them again on the floor, was silent.

"Well," he said, at length, "I said to the Abbé : 'Monsieur l'Abbé, if reason loses her empire over some minds, she still is reason.' 'Monsieur,' he said to me, 'who is unreasonable ; I, or M. de Vaudreuil ?' 'Both perhaps,' I said. 'Ah ! monsieur,' he cried, 'if reason teaches scepticism, would to God we were all unreasonable !' 'In point of folly,' I replied, 'M. de Vaudreuil leaves you nothing to desire.' You will pardon me this expression, my dear friend, will you not ?" added M. de Beaugency, in his *nonchalant* manner.

"Certainly, since folly, in your opinion, means faith in truth."

"The Abbé Mervil understood me. He looked at me with astonishment, as if he thought it strange to hear such a word applied to you. He has not seen you since the days when you were wise. 'Monsieur l'Abbé,' I added, 'M. de Vaudreuil only wants one thing to complete his enthusiasm ; that is, to hear you preach.' 'I preach no

longer,' he said, in a sorrowful tone. 'I know, and it is a pity. Conscience ought not to allow you to bury a talent like your own.' 'Talent is not the only requisite for preaching,' he said, with that sententious air you know he sometimes assumes. 'No, certainly,' I replied, 'conviction is absolutely necessary.' As I spoke, I fixed my eyes upon him, for my own reasons; and it was quite a treat to see the good Abbé blush with embarrassment. According to what I have heard, it seems, my dear Vaudreuil, as if you and he had taken opposite paths. You see your great enemy, scepticism, does not stop in its conquests."

"I bear no grudge against scepticism," said M. de Vaudreuil; "I think it has a legitimate part to play in the world, as in each individual life."

"And this part," said M. de Beaugency, "is to obtain empire over all minds."

"No, not so; but to prepare them for new opinions, by relieving them of old and incomplete ones."

M. de Vaudreuil was right. There are moments for nations as well as individuals, when it is necessary to fix a note of interrogation to all received creeds. There is always so much error in human opinions. Error, which springs up beside all truth, does not prevent it, at the time of its appearing, from penetrating and inspiring the age, because it does not clash with the demands of the times; but afterwards, when these demands have changed, error becomes an obstacle to its progress. Then it must be attacked. But it often happens, that in the impossibility of distinguishing one from the other, so closely are they interwoven, the true is often rejected

with the false. Hence, it happens that there always intervenes a period of doubt between two periods of faith. But there is no cause for alarm. We may even rejoice to see sincere minds forced by doubt to abandon the ancient edifice where they have so long sought shelter. The sooner it is pulled down, the sooner dawns the day of glorious reconstruction. We cannot, however, wonder at the dismay which seizes on mankind, when, the ground being strewn with ruins, and the foundation of the new edifice not even laid, they find themselves without an asylum. But mankind cannot resign itself on the subject of belief, to remain long without some harbour of refuge; let us do the same, and say, that if happy are the souls, and happy the nations where doubt has its days, or its hours, miserable are the minds and the people where doubt is established and perpetuated.

"In this day," continued M. de Vaudreuil, "France needs inspiration, and what can we do without it?"

"Repose," said M. de Beaugency, who was comfortably installed near the fire.

"The dead repose," said the Marquis.

"We must imitate them."

"We do sometimes, and we may succeed in becoming, like them, incapable of realising anything, or discovering anything."

"You know, Vaudreuil, that I never pretend to search for what is not to be found."

"I know your opinions," replied M. de Vaudreuil, "and I am surprised that you can support them. I am astonished at the joy you seem to feel in the dry and fatal wind which withers the world, as it has withered your own

heart. You know whither scepticism leads; you know better than any one its absolute weakness. We have both of us experienced that disastrous influence, which, after having ravaged and destroyed the power of thought, attacks the heart, and turns it cold, leaving it nothing to love, nothing to pursue. You can count your losses; France counts hers; she knows whence come the evils which devour her, the languor which possesses her, and, believe me, she loves not scepticism, though she has yielded to it. She feels its lowering, degrading influence. For of what is she capable beyond singing her own praises, or describing or deploring herself? This has been done with *eclat*. Great talents have been devoted to her service, and we have heard the harmonious complaints of the poet, and sighs of disappointment mingling with the accents of eloquence. But it is little to awaken a single sound—to give vibration to a single chord; and when this is done, scepticism can do no more. It can only repeat the sound. I ask you, who is not tired of these eternal repetitions? Scepticism can found nothing new; it can only deny or defer questions. Its last word is nothing. Is this enough for you? Is it enough for the world?"

"It is little enough," said M. de Beaugency; "but if there is no more, we must be content."

"No," said M. de Vaudreuil, "France will not be content. She will not—she cannot commit suicide, like some men, through cowardice or idleness. Already wanting life, she is desirous to live. She cannot resign herself to vegetate without impulse or principle. The rising generation put away with disgust the bitter cup presented to them. They cannot endure the disenchantment which

paralyses at once their strength and their hope. To escape from it they have recourse to the most absurd utopias—the most chimerical dreams. In the absence of truth, they see themselves reduced either to despair or illusion. Time, however, passes, and the evils increase. Nothing good can spring from despair—nothing real from illusion. After so many efforts—so much suffering—so many fruitless attempts—there remains but one thing : the vague presentiment of a better future. This presentiment sometimes almost fails, overcome by the heavy atmosphere, by the unexampled desolation which meets the eye in the moral world ; yet it is this which, day by day, is saving France. Oh, that this better future might dawn ! that France might take a new flight !”

“ And why not quietly walk ? Why fly ? What good is there in that ? ”

“ Because, before we can walk, we must gather strength in fresher, purer air ; we creep in this lower world, so long as the soul has not soared to those brighter regions where the good and the true and the beautiful, freed from the shackles of earthly conditions, shine in unmingled splendour.”

“ What charming work you are doing there ! ” said M. de Beaugency, turning suddenly to me.

I did not answer him ; I looked at M. de Vaudreuil. The elevation of his soul, reflected on every feature, gave more weight to the piercing irony of his mind. Nothing creates a livelier interest than the harmony of opposite qualities. He understood their union so well ! And they are intended to be united, for separately they do more harm than good. Feeling, without good sense, leads many

astray ; while good sense, destitute of feeling, is withering in its effects. They are not really antagonistic, and it is their union in great minds that produces great results.

M. de Beaugency, who had never felt but in one manner, and never seen but one side of things, was but little inclined to admire this harmony. If doubt arises from having too many points of view, scepticism is the result of having only one. A variety of views on the same subject prevents any precipitate affirmation ; but it furnishes the mind with all the elements it needs to bring it to a conclusion. On the contrary, the point of view being limited, and not affording to the intellect the necessary range, keeps it powerless. This disposition to consider but one side of the problem, is one of the chief causes of the scepticism of the present day. And speaking now only of human destiny, who is there who calmly contemplates it in all its extent ? Some see only its misery—others only its grandeur. There are none who understand it ; and in this state of ignorance, who is capable of directing it ? What is to keep us from sinking into the deepest despondency, when we discern only the intense misery of man, and of society ? How shall we avoid the most serious errors, when we consider only that greatness which must be realised, not merely contemplated at leisure ?

To M. de Vaudreuil, on the contrary, these two points of the same truth were equally familiar. If he had discovered the utter misery, first, of his own condition, then that of the whole world, he had found, too, that instead of this being the ultimate end of the soul, it is only the point of departure, whence the enfranchised soul

launches forth towards true greatness, and the supreme end of existence. To know the evils of an age—to know that there is a remedy for apparently irremediable scepticism—that in the place of old, untenable, weak opinions, may be substituted a real efficacious belief—a belief answering to the wants of the times; and to remain an indifferent spectator of this evil and weakness—to be satisfied and absorbed in his own happiness, and in the joy of his own restoration—would have been impossible to M. de Vaudreuil. It would have been belying his nature—renouncing the duties imposed on all men according to their ability. He felt that he must devote himself to those who were suffering as he had suffered; and the thought of this important object, as it became more and more strongly presented to his mind, set a seal of superiority upon his life. What a difference between the generous ardour that now engrossed his soul, and those bursts of selfish personal activity which for a time threatened his heart! It was ambition still, but legitimate, holy ambition, which completed the harmony of his being, instead of rendering it for ever impossible.

Every one who knew M. de Vaudreuil must have admired the wonderful order and peace that seemed to reign within him; but how much more, they who had previously witnessed the awful disorder of his soul! Madame de Vaudreuil felt that this was one of the ineffable joys which God reserves for those who have been chastised by suffering. Admiration alone would have sufficed to make her happy. The happiness of admiring is so pure—it detaches so completely from self, and at the same time it is so lively, so impetuous in passionate hearts, that it

must be ranked amongst the first of unmingled pleasures. But when to admiration is added love—when these two sentiments, commingling, and heightening one another, form together but one, then, how comprehensive soever God has formed the soul of man, it needs to be enlarged to take in this overwhelming stream of happiness.

I have often seen people who tenderly love one another, and I have said—"It is sweet so to love, and to be loved ;" but in contemplating M. and Madame de Vaudreuil, I said—"Such love is beautiful !" It was indeed beautiful, for it caused the noblest and most harmonious chords of the heart to vibrate. At the first touch, all was in movement, and all in concert.

Notwithstanding the appearance of health in Madame de Vaudreuil, there were symptoms, slight ones, it is true, but sufficient to alarm an experienced eye. She never complained. Sometimes, in her long conversations with her husband, when they had dwelt on their happy love and their common hopes, she would relapse into silence for a length of time ; then after a dreamy interval, she would take M. de Vaudreuil's hand, and press it between her own with a melancholy air, as if some sad presentiment mingled with her joy.

Was there some cloud hanging over their beautiful future ? After having suffered without God, was M. de Vaudreuil to learn to suffer with God ? That he might understand the intense happiness of the soul which God inundates with His love, must this happiness be tried by adversity, resist all its assaults, and survive all its anguish ? Does not joy suffice to rouse every energy ? And when

God would prepare for His work an exquisite instrument, does He always send in preparation an overwhelming measure of sorrow? If melancholy is a weakness, sorrow is strength to those who know how to use it. This strength would not be wanting to M. de Vaudreuil.

O God! if it is true that life is a struggle, and repose a short truce, supply us, we beseech Thee, with arms for the combat!

CHAPTER IV.

My marriage was to take place in a few days. The approaching event almost made me tremble. It seemed strange for me, who had always been so gay and light-hearted, to be engaged in an affair of such serious moment. I felt as if it had come upon me suddenly, and as if I had never till now felt its great importance, although I had been anticipating it for so long. I was afraid of not being equal to my new position ; and the remains of childishness attached to my character helped to make me feel anxious, and almost grave. Madame de Vaudreuil was amused, and tried to reassure me, reminding me how much I had progressed during the last few years. Certainly my residence at Vieilcastel had done much for me ; but I was not then aware of it, and Gaston seemed to move sometimes in regions quite beyond my reach.

One evening, in the twilight, when the Marchioness and I had been absorbed in reverie, I said—

“ Madame, what is life in reality ? Is it happiness, or sorrow ? ”

She was supporting her head on her hand, and no doubt was occupied with serious thought, for she turned gently towards me with a look of sympathy, without

replying, as if my words, instead of disturbing her, had been in unison with her train of thought.

"Tell me," I said, taking a low chair, and sitting down close beside her, "tell me, shall I not be always happy?"

"Do you doubt it, my child?"

"No, not in the least; I have tried and done my best to recollect all the sad things of life that I have heard, and my security and content only increase from hour to hour in a frightful manner. But I am afraid you will laugh at me."

She did smile, indeed; but I saw plainly by the light of the fire that it was not an unkind smile.

"And why," said she, "should you not be happy and satisfied? Life opens before you under such smiling auspices! When happiness such as yours forms the foundation, you may indeed trust for the future. Even dark days shine with the reflected light of deep affection. With this, there is no sorrow unbroken, for trials are often only a new source of felicity, elevating and drawing still closer together hearts already united. There is a joy, solemn, it is true, but full of intense delight, in the community of effort to support sorrow, which tends to the perfecting of the soul."

"I believe you, madame; but it seems to me far preferable to enjoy together than to suffer together."

"Certainly; but if there is so much pleasure in walking in the plain together, think what must be the heart's delight when the path mounts and winds even towards the summit, nearer to heaven,—far from the atmosphere of the lower regions! There is always an inexpressible joy in the thought of progress; but how much more so, when

we know that, by advancing in goodness and truth, we become capable of more perfect union ! With this thought, even great sorrow becomes endurable."

"It may be so ; yet I would not have life mere suffering."

"I am quite certain you would not," replied the Marchioness, in a tone of gentle raillery. "As regards experience, you certainly have not much ambition. And yet, Gabrielle, what do we live for, if not to strive and conquer ?"

"You will allow me to be happy, will you not, madame?"

"I allow you ? Yes, I wish you to be so," she said. "God has not without design crowded joys and pleasures into the entrance of life. If happiness does not call forth all the energies, it at least opens all the paths of life. The knowledge of joy in all its fulness is necessary, that the hope of regaining it may inspire courage, and urge on to action. I pity those unhappy beings who, having been content in their youth with a sort of half-happiness, with the happiness of vanity and appearance, are deprived of the sweet influence, and the inestimable lessons to be drawn from suffering after joy. It is so sad to have nothing to lose ! Ah ! were it true that we only ascended the mountain to be precipitately thrown from its summit, still it would be worth the trouble of mounting, to have discovered the brilliant horizon, the sight of which will for ever prevent us from taking deceitful, treacherous objects for true ones."

I was very glad to hear Madame de Vaudreuil speak thus of happiness. I felt more at liberty to enjoy it, when she said it might also be salutary ; and in my heart

there sprang up, although but feebly, the desire worthily to employ my great blessings. Surely, I thought, life must be easy, if the only question is to enjoy happiness, and to endure or to fly from suffering. But it is no such thing; and the variety of experience is as the ladder which ought to lead from the depths of our humiliation to the promised glory. What solemnity is there in the height of joy! What fear lest we should not draw forth its intended lessons! For every experience wasted has to be repeated—every neglected blessing is replaced by a sharper spur. God will not allow us to stop or to stand still. How skilful is the hammer in the Divine hand, in forging souls on the anvil of life! But there are souls which resist—which will not learn—which misuse their experience. Joy leads them to selfishness—sorrow to irritation; even the sight of their misery, to the adoration of it; life teaches them no lesson. But let us not despond at this spectacle. God will not be defeated by these poor souls; He knows how, by still harder conditions, to make them accomplish that which, if left alone, they would never realise.

The fire no longer gave out a flame. A dull red light just left the objects in the room visible. There was a long silence. Suddenly, as if the obscurity brought us into closer intimacy, Madame de Vaudreuil began to speak of herself with charming freedom. Her voice became more melodious, and as I listened to her it seemed to me that she, rather than I, had a right to be happy. Oh, how little I felt beside her! How skilful she seemed to have been in drawing lessons from joy and from sorrow!

Life for her had been sad, but her path plain. When we face evil, instead of yielding weakly to its approach, and preserve and cherish those qualities which rouse us to resistance, rather than suppress them through apathy, life is simple enough. It is seldom that we have to choose between two roads, unless the fear of suffering cause the heart to hesitate. If interest, or even happiness, be sacrificed to duty or generosity, without raising a question—if all be voluntarily abandoned without delay when higher claims require it, nothing is so easy as life !

“Gabrielle,” said the Marchioness, as she passed her arm around me, and pressed me tenderly to her heart, “Gabrielle, I am, I believe, more happy, more passionately happy than you are !”

“I do not know, madame, whether we are happier for being passionately happy.”

“You will see that in time to come. Happiness for you now is something so natural,—I had almost said, so inevitable,—that you do not attach the value to it that is felt for a blessing once lost, and which may be lost again. You cannot understand how, astonishment at finding oneself happy, adds to the intensity of happiness.”

She was silent for an instant, then resuming, in a lower tone, and as if the obscurity was not dark enough for the secrecy of such intimate communion, she said—

“There was a time when, after having hoped against hope for years, I thought I must renounce all hope. I made an entire sacrifice of my happiness to God, renewing it every day, hour by hour. But sometimes it was difficult to get through a day begun without a ray of happiness. This time seems long ago now, and yet—ah ! how can

I describe the bliss which rushed into my heart when God restored to me what He had taken away! My dreams even are surpassed! Oh, how beautiful sometimes is reality!"

I was deeply touched, not only by the words of the Marchioness, and the tone of significance in which she spoke, but by the friendship she shewed me in thus opening her heart to me.

"Madame," I said to her, "I feel all the distance that there is between you and me; you have knowledge—I can only anticipate; you have fought—I am still seeking my arms; but for all this, allow me to say, there is a link between us. I have learned so much from you! And now still let me follow you afar off—I know it will be very far off; but from whom could I learn to love as I ought to love, if not from you?"

She pressed my hand tenderly.

"My child," she said, "we must love largely. There are so many puerile, trifling, selfish or vain affections! Oh! I know yours will not be any of these. But, believe me, however large the heart may be, we must not fear to let it still widen. We know not how long God may spare to us those whom He has given us to love. Death may quickly interrupt our efforts. We should leave no joy unknown to them. We must haste and fill up the measure of their happiness,—such a measure as shall suffice them for all their life."

At this instant, lights were brought in, and our conversation was interrupted. I had in vain tried to discern the expression of the Marchioness's face, while she spoke to me; now I saw her features, and observed a mingling of

pensiveness and serenity which struck me. At the same moment M. de Vaudreuil entered. She was a little agitated at his appearance, as she often was, for she had not yet become quite accustomed to her happiness—it seemed always new and unexpected to her. A slight agitation disturbed but for a moment her habitually peaceful air. There was calmness in her ardour, and even passion could not destroy her charming equilibrium. Whence arose this strange phenomenon ?

Passion, it has often been said, is exclusive. It concentrates the mind on one object, and renders it indifferent to everything else. It can only be diffused by becoming less, and can only cease to reign by ceasing to exist. This is true ; as long as passion lasts, the soul must follow it—follow it everywhere, on to the heights, where the air is difficult of respiration, and into the abyss, where there is no resting-place, into guilty excess and unhappy imprudence. And yet, could we wish for the absence of passion in a soul which has once been possessed with it ? Is there no medium, where, free and strong, ardent and spontaneous, the soul may move unshackled and without stumbling ?

For passion to become a blessing instead of a curse, it must be detached from finite and earthly objects, and directed to the invisible and the infinite. Then, in accordance with the highest tendencies of the soul, it will give life, and inspire ardour, unknown before. It will reign, and it has a right to reign, for it leads to the Infinite. It concentrates the powers and widens the range of the heart, making it beat and burn for all upon which is the seal of the Infinite. The soul, being no longer captive to any

single earthly object, can embrace all, without one prevailing over another—without danger of any one sufficing for, or retaining her.

It is thus only that I can at all explain the expansive range of Madame de Vaudreuil's feelings—the sustained and palpitating interest with which she regarded the destiny of others—love filling her whole being. For it was not simply affection she felt, but indeed love,—love, the only sentiment which admits of no *arrière pensée*, no reserve of any kind. Too disinterested to exact a return—too full of life to perish when not fostered with care, it is yet changed to bitter suffering if the return be not entire—if any shade be wanting to complete the harmony. It places the soul in a state of dependence, which lowers it if the object is unworthy, but which exalts it if, on the contrary, its power of being freely and proudly happy is sacrificed to its desire to become complete by uniting itself with the qualities and gifts of another being. A perfect union of two souls has this marvellous result, that the exchange of qualities does not deprive either of originality, but bestows on each new strength, and, as it were, new weapons.

I perceive that, while wishing to tell of my marriage, I still dwell on Madame de Vaudreuil: perhaps because the sentiments that were then in embryo in myself, had attained in her a development that shewed their reason and their beauty: perhaps because, while trying to retrace my intimate thoughts at that time, a sort of embarrassment takes hold of me. Can it be more difficult to confess to oneself the exquisite emotions of the heart, than the errors of imagination, or the wanderings of the mind?

I know not ; but I feel that if some impressions, delicate and light as the dust on the petals of a flower, are destroyed when expressed in words, my own impressions, also delicate, but full of sap and of life which is their own, are strengthened by expression.

M. de Lussac thought, no doubt, that in his character of guardian, he was called upon to launch me into the world well provided with maxims necessary to steer my bark over the waves. The poor opinion he had of me, and which (just, perhaps, at the time of my arrival at Vieilcastel,) had never altered, inspired him with great anxiety as to my future life. I think he sincerely pitied Gaston ; out of compassion to him, as well as friendship for me, he made me long discourses upon my future duties. I think he would like to have given me an alphabetical list ; only the fear lest I should not sufficiently study it, made him prefer oral instructions, to which I reluctantly listened,—sighing, as he thought, because I felt myself unworthy, but, in reality, because Madame de Vaudreuil was waiting for me to go out with her, or Madame de Chambrie to talk to me of her son. My good guardian gravely represented to me the dangers to which this want of seriousness in my character exposed me.

“But,” I said to him, one day, “if I observe all you say, Gaston will not be able to endure me. He loves me as I am, and if I am transformed into a statue of reason, his love”——

At this word M. de Lussac turned red with indignation. Now he felt all the trouble he had taken to complete my education was thrown away, since I could entertain romantic ideas of a marriage, in his eyes so desirable for

worldly considerations! His code of virtues was composed of restrictive principles. His maxims were regularly cut, like the trees in a garden *à la Française*. Love appeared to him something quite monstrous. It is so sometimes to honest hearts, who, knowing nothing about it, conceive the strangest ideas. Dido burning on the pile, Calypso wandering inconsolable on the sea-shore, were the images called up to his mind by the word "love." I blushed, also, when I found what a mistake I had made. I was alone with my guardian, and there was no one to come to my succour; and I was too much embarrassed to hazard an excuse. So I stood still, looking down, waiting for M. de Lussac to speak. But I suppose he could find no terms sufficiently strong for the occasion, for he kept silence, without the slightest pity for my distress. At last I gently disengaged my hand, which he had kept tight in his own all the time of the discourse, and fled from the room, to breathe freely in the Marchioness's apartment.

There I met Gaston, and told him what had passed.

"Would your guardian, then, not have me love you?" he asked.

"He would prefer that you should esteem me; and yet he thinks me so little estimable."

Gaston began to laugh.

"Well," I said, "does the idea of esteeming me appear so absurd to you?"

"Quite absurd," he replied.

I advanced, as he spoke, into a recess of the window. Gaston followed me. It was the eve of the day fixed for our marriage. Madame de Vaudreuil kindly took a book, and seated herself at the other end of the room.

"I am sorry," I said, "that you hold so lightly my claim to esteem."

"You have so often told me," replied Gaston, "that you cannot endure serious words! I dare not tell you how far beyond all those cold expressions is the love with which you inspire me."

"I must accustom myself to listen to you."

"Is that so difficult, then? Is it painful to you to hear that you are so perfectly beloved?"

"No, certainly not; but when you express your sentiments, you would have me, in my turn, express mine, and this embarrasses me."

"Do you know, Gabrielle, that this is the last time that you can, out of pure generosity, assure me of your affection. This evening I shall scarcely be able to speak with you, in the crowd that will be assembled in my mother's drawing-room; and to-morrow, when we are again alone, I shall have a right to all that is in your heart."

Gaston continued talking with me, in a low tone, and our conversation became very intimate. In spite of the timidity I felt, it was easier for me to speak to Gaston of my love to him, than to confide it to any other person. When we are sensible of a very strong emotion, we shrink from the thought that the unconcerned may confound it with other feelings, essentially different, though perhaps wearing the same garb. We need to be understood in the very smallest details; and how can we be, except by the one who has inspired us with the love?

It had cost me much to confess, even to myself, how necessary Gaston's love was to me. I had felt vexed to be obliged to acknowledge, that, instead of graciously con-

descending to favour him with my hand, in pride and indifference, I had come to that pass that I could not do without his affection ; and I had felt humiliated by the thought that I no longer belonged to myself, and sometimes wished to resume my ancient freedom ; but this feeling was gone. I now understood that we possess only that we may bestow. There are many people who are incapable of this ; because, not knowing how to hold the reins of their own feelings, they cannot entrust them to another, nor take those given to them in exchange. Worthily to accomplish such an exchange, there needs a soul fully mistress of itself, and of life. I like now to think how complete was the surrender of my heart, and that, on the eve of being entirely Gaston's, a sentiment of sweet and charming hope was mingled with my natural fear.

We were conversing more freely than we had ever done, when suddenly Madame de Vaudreuil, whom I had not heard approach, laid her hand on mine. She drew it from Gaston's, and separated us by gently placing herself between us. •

"Take care," she said, with a graceful mixture of sympathy and playfulness ; "here is M. de Lussac ; he seems to distrust my surveillance."

My guardian entered, looking very grave. He seemed quite scandalised to see us three standing in the window, from which there was really nothing to be seen but bare trees. He said nothing, however ; but what would he not have said, had he entered a few minutes sooner ? According to strict propriety, no doubt, I ought to have been sitting close to Madame de Vaudreuil, on one side of the fire-place, and Gaston opposite to us.

The next day, as I walked up the church on M. de Lussac's arm, rather nervous, and much impressed by the solemnity of the circumstances, my eyes, timidly raised upon the crowd of spectators, suddenly met those of M. de Beaugency fixed on me with an expression of polite raillery. M. de Beaugency had always seemed to like me, because of the impertinent things I allowed myself to say to him. In such freedom, there was an absence of all delusion, which flattered him. To attack human nature, even in his person, was to render homage to his principles ; but to marry Gaston for love and not for reason, was quite contrary to them. As I gave him my heart, human nature, of course, appeared to me in an agreeable light. M. de Beaugency did not approve of this ; such perfect felicity appeared foolish to him. He had expected more wisdom from me. When he saw the agitation of my countenance, his own lighted up. A slight shade of sarcasm expressed his inward satisfaction ; agitation, however absurd in his eyes, was less unpalatable to him than happiness without a cloud.

But for myself, when I saw his ironical smile, all my self-possession returned, and all my pride ; I felt I could defy all irony. I had reason on my side, and instead of an unmeaning enthusiasm, I had in my soul a source of true and deep emotion. Contempt and ridicule might fall on the right hand and on the left, on beings mean enough to feel no emotion, and on minds false enough to dress up in the garb of feeling foolish imaginations and bootless aspirations ; but I had avoided both dangers, and stood on firm ground ; I felt proud of my success. I cast a look of triumph on M. de Beaugency, and then,

with head erect and my heart at ease, I arrived at the place assigned to me.

I will not say what I felt when the ceremony was over. An attachment, which in the beginning was almost wrong, because not authorised by the approbation of my guardian, was now become a duty. Henceforth, I could not go too far in the path whither my inclination led me; for if we may love wrongly, we cannot, I think, love too well—indeed, we cannot love enough. Nature or benevolence commands most of our affections; love is born of the spontaneous choice of our hearts. In love, the heart is free; it devotes itself, and yields only when it will; but it wearies of its own generosity, and grows tired of giving freely. Duty is so consonant to the soul, that she is eager for its claims. The soul loves to be deprived of that independence which admits the idea of recalling its gifts, and wounds her by making a merit of its devotion. The soul prefers to owe all, because then she feels no longer her own, but enchained for ever; and I bless the hour from which my heart has needed no more to measure its liberality. Life opened upon me rich and fertile. I had but to follow the path which lay before me.

In the evening, I sought out M. de Beaugency from among the crowd assembled in the salon of the Marchioness. At last I found him.

“Confess,” I said to him, as I turned on my finger the marriage-ring, “confess that you hold me in great contempt to-day.”

“Why? You are young, it is true, but that will not always be the case.”

" But, in the mean time, would you not like to see me reasonable ? "

" Certainly ; those who are not reasonable in joy, are not likely to be so in sorrow."

" Ah ! monsieur," I cried, " sorrow and I have nothing in common."

" More, perhaps, than you think. Look there."

I turned my eyes in the direction denoted by M. de Beaugency. I saw Gaston conversing with Madame de Vaudreuil, and my heart swelled with joy as I looked at them, and thought of the future promised to me, till tears sprang to my eyes, and, absorbed in the contemplation, I forgot my companion.

" Do you see ? " he said.

" Certainly," I replied, still occupied all the time with Gaston.

" Does she not indeed look very feeble ? She is only a shadow—it is frightful to see her."

I blushed on perceiving that my attention and thoughts followed a different direction from what M. de Beaugency intended. He did not remark it. It was the first time in my presence that he had laid aside the part of an observer, to entertain a personal emotion.

" She has a colour," I replied.

" It is fever, my child, it is fever."

He said these words sadly, and I was touched by their tone, although I did not attach great importance to them as regarded the health of the Marchioness. The decline of Madame de Vaudreuil during the last few weeks, the frequency of her cough, the exhaustion of her strength, had escaped me in the fulness of my own joy.

"Monsieur," I said to him, in the effusion of the moment, "you seem to me unreasonable now, and I like you the more for it."

He tried to smile and to reply to me, but the smile died from his lips. He approached the Marchioness, and I perceived that the sort of ill-humour with which he had been accustomed, during the whole winter, to address her, now yielded to the air of despondency and resignation which he usually wore.

But as for me, my heart was full of hope. Life, indeed, might mean combat, but it also meant triumph. Was I wrong or right? Will optimism, which is the first word, be also the last? Shall we find this word, which we pronounce at first in inexperience, and without comprehending its whole meaning, to be the summary of wisdom, and the highest expression of truth? Do we come back to it in spite of all the apparent contradictions, and incessant, obstinate evils of life? Some say it is a deceitful word, and yet how could we live without believing in it?

CHAPTER V.

MADAME DE VAUDREUIL was very ill. The appearance of health, which for months past had made us glad, was deceitful. She had in reality never recovered from the shock of the preceding year; and the disease, arrested for an instant, resumed its empire, and seemed now to prey upon her delicate frame. Yet she never complained. To our questions, she replied that she was well, only a little weak, and very happy. She would smile as she said these words; her beautiful countenance lighted up with calm joy, her cheeks suffused with a brighter shade, and her eyes, with their heavenly expression, made the inquirer forget the question, and transported him into the regions of enthusiasm and love. When she said to me, "I am better," no doubt crossed my mind; I believed her words, instead of trusting to the testimony of my eyes. Her emaciated form and obstinate cough, the rapid change from feverish excitement to dejection,—all these and other alarming symptoms appeared to me as the results of a severe winter. A sort of instinctive fear made me fly from anxiety that would have tormented my heart.

M. de Vaudreuil was far from indulging in this feeling

of security. His eye, more experienced than mine, could not deceive him. He endeavoured to divert the Marchioness, and to procure for her at home the amusement she could no longer seek abroad. He cheered her by the new and striking things he would relate to her, and testified his tenderness in a manner that charmed without exciting her, watching over her slightest wants, without letting her perceive the anxious care and attention that pervaded all he did. Was it surprising that, even in the midst of suffering, she should feel so happy?

The sight of my happiness, and its brilliant commencement, was not painful to M. de Vaudreuil, notwithstanding the contrast between it and the cruel clouds suspended over his own head. He often came to see me in my new home, where I was delighted to do the honours with all the grace and dignity of a new lady of the house. To talk with me, was to be still occupied with his wife; for was not I her work? She had had such great influence over me. She had brought my faculties into play; she had warmed me with her own tenderness, and had imparted of her own life to me. He could speak freely of her to us, sometimes expressing his fears, and at others seeking for some ray of hope.

One evening, when the Marchioness, through extreme exhaustion, was forced to retire to bed, the Marquis came to spend a few hours with us. It was nearly a month after our marriage. We were both sitting at a table, on which Gaston had laid the book from which he had been reading. Some sentence had appealed to our feelings, and we were examining these and discussing them, and, instead of continuing the reading, had digressed into a thousand

charming things, which may be repeated again and again, always taking some new form and freshness. To the delights of the present, were already added a few reminiscences ; and words now conveyed to us a deeper and wider sense, because, not only speaking of a happy future, they brought allusion to emotions already experienced, and joys which had been actually tasted.

I suppose our countenances betrayed our feelings, for M. de Vaudreuil seemed to understand us when he entered. He smiled kindly, and looked with sympathy upon us, as if the sight of such perfect felicity rejoiced and affected him. There is in the sympathy of the afflicted with the happy, a degree of disinterestedness which speaks of the work of Divine grace in their souls. Nothing testifies so much to the real change of heart, as this faculty of transporting self from its own sorrows to enter into the joys of others. Alas ! how seldom are we able to give of our own happiness, and take upon ourselves another's grief !

"How is Madame de Vaudreuil ?" I asked of the Marquis.

"She is very ill-to night, and has passed a very sad day."

"Really ! I saw her this morning, and she did not complain."

"You know she never complains. This silence on her part obliges me to be very reserved. I cannot speak to her of all I feel—of all I fear now. She is calm, and I must not agitate her by, perhaps, useless anxiety. My dear friends, may you always be happy, and do not squander your happiness !"

"You will see," I cried, "whether we are not good navigators."

"It is not difficult to steer when joy fills the sails," said the Marquis; "but we must sail on, with or without joy. There are moments when this seems almost impossible, yet it is not so. The only thing absolutely insupportable, is the feeling that we have failed in the object of our life."

"But how can they escape this feeling, who believe that happiness is the end of life?" said Gaston.

"But it is not," replied the Marquis; "it is only an instrument, like many other things of this world; even without it, life may be rich and fruitful. Oh, what need we have to learn this! Deprived of happiness, what need we have of hope! Hope may be the only possible inspiration of life left to us; but this we may always retain."

I shall never forget M. de Vaudreuil's countenance as he said these words. There was read the triumph of the soul over bitter and acute suffering. He looked earnestly at us, and I cannot tell how painful was that look of sympathy with, and admiration for, our unclouded happiness, coming from a man who knew that, for himself, the future only contained cruel, though salutary, lessons of sorrow.

Life for M. de Vaudreuil was on the eve of becoming cheerless and solitary. No doubt, he was strong enough to walk without support, since God withdrew it from him. Still, however strongly nerved, the mind must feel some fear on the entrance upon a barren country, which is to be traversed through cold and darkness, and needs to be reassured by glancing through the darkness, and distinguishing what is beyond. For, if the soul can survive happiness, it cannot live without hope. M. de Vaudreuil

held fast to hope. The time was past, when, to escape his grief, he would willingly have numbed all his feelings. In his enlarged soul, disembarrassed of all doubts and murmurs, of selfishness and pride, there was now room for joy as well as suffering, with all their noble and sublime inspirations. Both now could be fully developed in him, for both were supported by heavenly hope. I ask, how can we enjoy, if, through joys that have an end, we do not glance at everlasting joys? How could we suffer, if suffering did not lead the agonised soul to light and consolation?

There is, perhaps, no sentiment so rare as hope. I speak of that real, true hope which sheds its light on the whole life, and which, passing over earthly and finite objects, fixes the eye on immortality, and devotes to it the heart and all earthly possessions. It is for want of this hope that life is so hard to many unhappy ones, and that from its very threshold they are weary and trembling. For I do not call that life which brings us to the end of every day, experiencing successively the good and the evil, without perceiving the relation existing between them, and so remaining, notwithstanding all trials, ignorant and incapable of learning. I call that a frittering away of life—convulsive movements, without result or bearing, taking the place of life. Life is a poem, all parts of which must tend to the same end. It is hope that bestows this necessary unity, that stirs up all the faculties in pursuit of an object she is sure to attain. Without hope, how could we proceed? Why set out, if we know not whither the road leads, nor indeed whether it leads anywhere?

With what agony, with what grief, had not M. de Vandreuil, during all these years, pursued hope! He had sought it in all systems,—in his own soul; then he cursed it, and it was forgotten in his own absorbing selfishness and vain aspiration. Strange to say, on the day when, in humiliation, he contemplated with disdain the frivolous goods of earth, when he saw his only chance of happiness threatened by death, his own nature deeply sullied and corrupted, immortal hope—veiled, it is true, at first, but afterwards all radiant in glory—rose with healing and consolation before his bewildered eyes. Then, like the poet, he was able to exclaim—“My heart is so joyous, that I know it no more for my own!”

God, in order to force us to lofty desires, has so ordained life that we are refused those lesser joys with which we would fain be satisfied. Life is sparing of that limited happiness which makes a day bright, or a year endurable, and if it is granted to us, it is also after a while withdrawn. On the contrary, the most complete satisfaction is promised to that hunger and thirst which require the entire restoration of all things—perfect felicity for all men, and the final triumph of God over evil.

There is no greater obstacle to true and right feelings, than those feelings which, with the same name and appearance, try to take their place, and to appropriate the soul for their own benefit. Selfish and personal hopes and wishes stifle that better hope, which alone never deceives. Blind optimism, which is for ever repeating that every thing is for the best, in this best of worlds, prevents the rise of true optimism—the optimism of results and conclusions. Let us, then, allow life to perform its part. Let

it destroy and chase from our breasts all those illusions in which we have delighted. It has a purpose, too, and prepares the soul for better things and holier guests. Ah ! let us not be among those who leave the place void, and never invite the heavenly guests.

On the approach of spring, I went with Gaston to Chambrie, to pass some months among my new connexions. I wrote often to Madame de Vaudreuil. She replied by very short notes to me. Sometimes serious, almost sad words would steal in, striking me more as they were in such contrast with the serene tone of the whole. These notes, by degrees, became shorter and more rare. It was as though she furled her sails that she might not be carried into the open sea. She wished to remain in sight of port.

In the month of June she came to Chambrie. Country air was necessary for her, and Vieilcastel too far off. How grieved I was when I saw her ! She could not walk without support, and even then a few steps were all she could take. Notwithstanding her efforts, she was obliged to give up living amongst us. She remained in her own room, away from the trouble of visitors and the noise of a large family. When it was very fine, she was carried out into the park. There she passed many hours, reclining on her couch, silent and pensive in the sunshine, listening to the songs of the birds, and breathing the perfume of the flowers. The trees and soft breezes—the outline of the distant hills against the horizon—the blue sky and limpid water,—all, no doubt, whispered to her of their secrets ; for she would smile as she passed her eyes from one object to another ; but she scarcely ever spoke, either fearing to exhaust her strength, or preferring silence, that she might

be more ready to listen to the accents that reached her from above. I often sat beside her, in the garden, to be ready to supply her slightest want, and she would thank me with the grace that pervaded all her actions, even her sufferings; but she excused herself from conversing as she would have wished to do, although she would let words fall at rare intervals—tender, deep words—that were long remembered and treasured.

M. de Vaudreuil scarcely ever left his wife. She understood all his cares, and knew all his anxieties, though she could not speak of them. When, on recovering from some extreme faintness, she opened her eyes and saw him near her, full of sad anxiety, she would look at him earnestly with a look that pierced his soul, for he knew that she read his heart; but he could not speak.

"Victor," she said to him, one day, "shall we never speak of what most occupies our thoughts?"

He took her extended hand, and sitting down close beside her—

"Is it not for you to begin, my beloved?" he said, tenderly, and with difficulty restraining the emotion that agitated him.

"Well," she said, "I will begin. I want your support for my heart as well as for my tottering steps."

"Does this long suffering, my love, exhaust your courage?"

"No, Victor, but my hope. I know I must leave you. You know it too, my beloved; you will teach me to bear it."

M. de Vaudreuil could not reply. He covered his face with his hands to conceal his emotion. The dangerous state of his wife had filled him with anguish for some time

past. He knew and had faced the truth ; but it is one thing secretly to entertain anxiety, and quite another to speak to the being we tremble to lose of the coming separation. It seemed to him that now for the first time he understood the agony awaiting him. He was overcome by it.

"I was right," she resumed ; "I feared your sorrow. I did not dare to touch the tender chord, and yet I need—yes I absolutely need your support. Now that my heart is so closely united to yours, I cannot suffer alone. I have grown accustomed to such sweet habits."

"Ah, my beloved ! what do you demand of me ? How can I support you—I, who alone am to be pitied—alone am unhappy ? I would wish to do it ; I *will* do it—for my love will give me strength. It will teach me to speak to you of heavenly consolation, and of immortal hope."

"All these things," she said, "are present to my mind, and living in my soul. God speaks to me, and I hear Him. But, my beloved, what I want to speak to you of—what is really necessary to my peace is, the consideration of what your life will be after my death. I shrink from the thought of death, when I imagine your desolation, your grief. Support me against this fear. Shew me that you have strength for the separation that awaits us."

"Strength will be given me, my beloved. And besides, our separation will not be complete. When two hearts love as ours do, the eyes may be deprived of the sight of the beloved one, but the souls remain in communion. I shall never entirely lose you ! Ah ! believe me, the shadow, the remembrance only of such happiness as ours has been, may suffice for a long life of loneliness."

To speak thus, M. de Vaudreuil had made a great

effort. Not that he did not feel in his inmost heart all he said; but it is so painful to speak of a sorrow, dreaded above all things, as a matter of course—no longer admitting of doubt, or much delay. The Marchioness did not like others to turn their eyes from a prospect which was certain. She had always looked so simply before her. She did not understand the subterfuges by which some escape the forebodings of their hearts.

"You do me good," she said. "You speak of happiness. Oh! that I could inundate your heart with joy! I fear lest I have enjoyed too selfishly, for some months past, the happiness you have bestowed on me. I did so little for you whilst I was able! And now, I shall only be a subject of sorrow to you."

"You recall to me thoughts I cannot bear," said M. de Vaudreuil.

"I do not understand you, Victor."

"If you," said he, "who have always been to me more than I could wish or imagine, regret not having done more, what must I do, who have a whole past life to regret?"

"Ah!" said she, "I remember that no more."

Then blushing, she added—

"Or, if I remember it, it is to become more happy by the remembrance."

"But I, Jeanne—I recall the past; and when I see you, weak and feeble, with no strength left to repel the disease which consumes you, think what aggravation of my grief is the thought that my neglect of you"—

"No," she replied, interrupting him with an animated gesture, that recalled her happiest days; "never speak

so. If it is true that feeling has influence over the life of the body, it is happiness alone that has shortened my days. My bark founders, for it is overladen with joy. I have no longer strength to support the quick beatings of a heart from which you have chased all sorrow. The balance is destroyed. My beloved ! what death can be so happy as death from excess of joy ? ”

Her eyes sparkled—she looked excited, and it was plain to see she longed to convince her husband. The last words, however, she pronounced in a low tone, and fell back exhausted on her pillows. M. de Vaudreuil took one of her burning hands, and kissed it tenderly. She lay for some time with her eyes closed. He looked at her, with all that reverence that we feel for one who is nearer heaven than we are ourselves.

“ It seems to me,” she said, after a little time, “ that I have no need to walk any longer. You will bear me in your arms, till you place me in those of Christ. How easy is all,—even this daily decline—even death, my beloved, with you beside me ! ”

“ God,” said he, “ will bless the days that are left to us. We may each worthily prepare—you for the awful passage, I for the bitterness of a solitary life. May the last moments of our tender union be blessed to the good of our souls ! Ah ! surely, if ever, this is the moment to feel the blessing of that other union, which alone gives importance to this life, and a motive for existence—that of the soul with Christ, her Saviour and her guide.”

This conversation did them both good, for it linked them still closer together. The same thought animated them both—to make use of the time that might yet be

granted to them, by fortifying each other to meet the solemn hour. Thus they drank slowly the last drops of happiness remaining to them in the earthly cup: she, always occupied in providing consoling remembrances for her husband; he, in trying, by his calmness, to prove to his wife that these remembrances would be the inspiration of his life.

I think it is not possible to entertain for any lengthened period this elevation of sentiment. Human weakness has its claims, and a great addition to trials is the consciousness that we do not worthily bear them. The moments of frailty arrive only too soon; but how good it is to have known those higher impulses—to have lived upon the heights! The soul descends from them strengthened; and even in the days of deepest dejection, she knows whither she may aspire, and what consolations are promised her!

Certainly it is impossible for the sick at heart to live in joy. This would not even be desirable. Such an one must suffer, and drink his bitter cup, that the fruits of his sorrow may appear; but he may be reassured by the convictions of his mind, which will inspire him with courage, and a sacred hope for the future, even though joy may not be for him. This optimism of the mind seems to me like a litter which transports to the place of cure the unhappy being, who, without this help, must have died on the road, through weakness and neglect.

Madame de Vaudreuil could now die in peace. Her husband, confiding in Christ, had found strength to support all sorrow. Without Christ, all is darkness; with Him, what brilliant light is shed around our life! Though

separations may increase, and existence become dreary—though the world may go on still further in wickedness, by Him all shall be restored. Oh! the triumph of good over evil! The very thought of that day makes the heart leap with joy, and fills the soul with gratitude!

CHAPTER VI.

TOWARDS July, the Marchioness became a little better, and the physicians wished to take advantage of her amendment to send her to the south, to try the waters of the Pyrenees. She consented to the plan, although she had no faith in its efficacy. The thought of staying for a few days at Vieilcastel consoled her for the trouble of the journey.

Her departure was sad indeed. We were all assembled in the hall, the carriage was at the door, and the horses were stamping with impatience, when she appeared at the head of the stairs; she was carried down, being too weak to walk. She was very pale and cold, although the day was hot; and the smile on her lips was so sad and tender, that we were all bathed in tears when we looked at her. She was calm, for great weakness incapacitated her for emotion. Every one went up to say good-bye to her. Fears not to be expressed arrested our words, for how could we speak of her getting better?

My guardian in his turn took leave of her. He was the last. He took her cold hand in his own, and, with an effort, said—"My child, farewell till we meet again; a few months will establish your health, and bring you

again amongst us. I shall yet see you, on some fête day, the admired of all."

The Marchioness shook her head.

"Ah!" he replied, "you feel compassion for a grey head, presumptuous enough to speak of the future. Adieu, my child; may God preserve me alive till you return!"

She kissed the hand of the good old man, and smiled sadly as she looked at me.

The first news we had of her were good. She had borne the journey well, and seemed to enjoy the mildness of the air. Being no longer a witness of her sufferings, and hearing M. de Lussac speak continually of her recovery, I insensibly became reassured, and felt delighted to have no more care in my heart. I forgot the hollow, bloodless cheeks, and the image of the Marchioness recovered in my mind the appearance of life and health she wore at the beginning of the preceding winter. My joyous nature regained the ascendancy; and I confess I felt a degree of pride in the thought, that in spite of all the threatening clouds, sorrow was not yet to darken my path.

One day, on returning from a long walk with Madame de Chambrie, I found Gaston in great agitation. He held a letter in his hand, and was agitated when I asked him whence it came.

"It contains news from Vieilcastel."

"Good news?"

"Alas! No."

I seized the letter and read hastily—

"My dear friends," wrote M. de Vaudreuil, "she is

very ill. We can no longer deceive ourselves. Two days ago she was carried on to the balcony. She enjoyed the view exceedingly, the snowy peaks and the fertile valley that Gabrielle knows so well. She felt much revived, and said to me, breathing the perfume of the flowers beneath—'Who knows but that God may yet restore me to your prayers!' We were to have left to-day for the waters. Yesterday the most serious attacks came on, and now she will never leave again the bed where she lies, so quiet and so patient, that one might think this bitter cup was of her own choosing. She has scarcely strength to speak or to hear; yet she speaks to me by her earnest look, by her sweet smile, and by all her tenderness. We perfectly understand one another, and never before were our souls so closely united. Oh! how precious are these days—these last days of happiness!

"There is a great difference, my dear friend, between the anticipation of sorrow like this, and feeling that it is ready to burst over our head. My heart is breaking. But why should I speak to you of myself? You will feel for me; you are too happy yourself not to be able to imagine what must be the agony of the heart, where affection is changed to torment, and must soon, alas! be swallowed up in regret. I know that you love her. Gabrielle and you have both discerned her noble nature. To say that you love her, is to speak your own praise; for there are some qualities only to be appreciated by those who possess the same in some degree. Such are hers. She has one desire—to see Gabrielle again. You must come quickly, for her days are numbered. I cannot tell you how grieved I feel to disturb your happiness; but

at least, my dear friends, you are two to support the blow ; I shall soon be quite alone. Oh ! I pray you, do not delay ! We cannot keep death back, and he advances with rapid strides. . . . I have just been again into my wife's room. She is more feeble now than she was this morning ; she did not speak to me. O God ! I thank Thee for having given us the power of loving !”

“ Let us go,” I said to Gaston,—the letter falling from my hands, and my eyes blinded with tears.

“ The horses are ordered.”

In another hour we were on our way to Vieilcastel. The horses bore us rapidly along. I scarcely knew what was passing in my mind. It was something so new, so unexpected to me. I had known that Madame de Vaudreuil was in a dangerous state ; I had often heard her husband speak of her with the deepest anxiety ; but her actual death had never appeared to me an event for which I must really prepare myself, and to which I should be called on to submit. I was overcome, as though the blow were sudden and unlooked for.

It seemed to me that in losing Madame de Vaudreuil I should lose myself. It was she who taught me to think, to feel, and to live. Should I be able to continue without her the work which without her I should never have commenced ? I thought of all my carelessness and ignorance, on my first arrival at Vieilcastel. Were all these failings to come over me again ? Were these few years of progress to be merely as an episode—a digression in my life ? I was still ignorant of all that is to be gained by soaring on one's own wings. It is so difficult, so hard to learn !

We scarcely spoke during the journey. My ideas were too confused, my thoughts too tumultuous, to find expression. But the sight of the Pyrenees calmed me. There is something in the aspect of sublime nature which imposes silence on the most violent agitation. This grand image of repose checks the mutability of one's impressions. We remain sad, but conscious that there reigns One above who orders all things, and knows why He does it. Sorrow by itself wounds the heart, but does not terrify it. The soul is conscious of a secret affinity between herself and this awful power. It is disorder, or the appearance of disorder, that disturbs her. All that recalls her to the sense of Divine Providence, calms and fortifies her.

As we approached Vieilcastel, I feared every moment to learn some fatal news. If we must lose her, I thought, I would so gladly receive her last words. May she teach me to die, as she has taught me to live !

The first person we perceived on our arrival was M. de Beaugency. He was walking in front of the castle, in the sunshine, and with his usual careless manner. He turned as he heard the carriage, and I perceived the singular expression of his countenance. Beneath his accustomed air of melancholy, was visible, if not agitation,—for this is too strong a term,—yet a sort of uneasiness, in which was mingled a feeling of repining against destiny, and shame at being dragged from his systematic indifference. He seemed like a man dropped from another sphere, whose usual maxims are not sufficient for him, and who yet clings to them from pride or sloth. Notwithstanding his pretensions, his indifference was not such but that his heart

was deeply touched. He appeared very miserable ; in the midst of his labelled prescriptions against every sorrow, not one helped him here, although he tried them all. His features were drawn ; his face thinner than usual ; his step slower, and his voice even more dry.

" You are come to see her," he said, offering me his hand to descend from the carriage.

" Ah !" I said, " I have been so impatient to get here ! How is she ? Is she at all better ?"

" Better ! How can you think she should be better ? She is getting worse every day, every hour. She is dying."

" Does she suffer much ?"

" Of course she does. It is all very easy to die in novels, but in reality it is quite another thing. I don't know why you are come. This is no sight to seek. To speak plainly," he added, turning half away from me, " I think, Gaston, it is very absurd of you to bring your wife here. Why seek such excitement as this ? It is very useless."

" Then why, monsieur, are you here ?" demanded Gaston.

M. de Beaugency hastily opened the door of the drawing-room, and did not reply. I could not restrain my tears, as I entered the room where I had seen her so often, and was to see her no more. On the table was still a book we had read together the year before, ere we departed for Paris. All the furniture was arranged in perfect order. Nothing spoke of life or motion. It was plain that the mistress of the dwelling had not been in the room since her arrival. There is something so desolate in uninhabited rooms !

M. de Beaugency walked up and down, without attempting to calm the sorrow he felt but would not express. Before this reality, all his theories crumbled away. He was better than he wished to be. All was not dead in his heart; and if he had succeeded in deadening his feelings, and drying up his soul, he had not been able to put himself entirely beyond the reach of all painful emotion—of all thoughts of doubt and uncertainty. An irresistible instinct had led him to this death-bed scene, and yet he had a horror of facing death. To be resigned to the evils of life because they are inevitable—to endure them without probing them too deeply—to be careless, because naturally serious, the depths whither reflection leads are dreaded. All this may be seen daily; it is a mean way, but a convenient and very frequent one, of getting released from the inextricable difficulties of existence. This system is possible in life, but not in the presence of death. That is an evil to which we cannot resign ourselves, without understanding it; and what is a system worth, that fails us on an occasion when we most need to be reassured and supported? But instead of accusing his miserable palliations, M. de Beaugency accused himself for not having made a better use of them, and hardened his heart to meet any shock. His only consolation amidst all the sorrow that events and the impressions arising from them occasioned him, was his self-congratulation at his supreme contempt for all the pleasures of life, so fleeting and so vain.

Suddenly he stopped before me, saying—

“ Was I not right, when I said all is delusion in this world? Do you not now see the proof of it? So young!

so beautiful! so good and kind, even to those who smiled at her graceful folly and simple enthusiasm! So much loved! So happy, after years of suffering! And to die! To die at twenty-nine years of age! And why die, if not that the bitter mockery of all human affairs may be complete? I would like to know what she thinks now of her hope, and of her enjoyment of life. Poor woman!"

Ah! poor man, rather. There was an unpleasant expression of curiosity on his countenance, as he said the last words. The malignity of his mind seemed to triumph over the impulses of his better nature. I shut my eyes that I might not see it, for it hurt and troubled me. Ah! how gladly would I now have hastened to her, as I was accustomed to do, saying—"All this is not true, is it? Truth is full of consolation—full of beauty. Oh, speak to me of it! You know it so well, and have realised it in your own soul!"

Gaston perceived the painful impression made upon me by M. de Beaugency's words. He took my hand, and I read in his eyes that our feelings were the same. Ah! my God, I bless and praise Thee that Thou hast created hearts capable of understanding and communing with one another!

M. de Vaudreuil entered the room. There was no care upon his brow. Alas! uncertainty alone gives this, and there was no uncertainty in him. There was no struggle expressed on his countenance, but the most intense grief on all his features. A faint smile came across his lips when he saw us; but it seemed to darken, rather than to lighten up his face. Was it that our happiness contrasted with his own condition? His entrance silenced us all,

and stayed my tears ; for we felt that in presence of such grief as his, our own must not be expressed. He came to us, and, taking a hand of each, he said—

“ I knew that you would come ;” then, addressing me, he continued—“ Jeanne is very impatient to see you.”

My heart beat as I followed M. de Vaudreuil along the well-known galleries and stairs. The place was so dear to me, and I had left it so happy ! I thought of the Marchioness almost distractedly. We had been parted but such a short time, and now all was changed ! I expected to see the image of death, and was surprised to find Madame de Vaudreuil still beautiful, and on her cheeks an appearance of life. Her disease—the only one that seems to take pleasure in beautifying its victims—had but rendered her complexion more transparent, and her weakness more striking. She lay on the bed silent and composed. The window was half open, admitting the heat of the day, but keeping out the bright rays of the sun. She seemed very glad to see me.

“ You are come,” she said ; “ it takes a great weight from my heart.”

She signed to her husband to leave us alone. As soon as he was gone—

“ You understand, do you not ?” she said, with an angelic smile. “ I knew I could rely on your friendship. I did not like him to be alone in his sorrow. Now I am at peace.”

“ Thank you,” I said, “ for having given us the right of consoling him. He will not refuse a help that you yourself have arranged for him.”

She could not continue the conversation ; but she was

calm all the day, and her husband assured us that he had not seen her so composed for a long time.

Some days passed, almost a week, without bringing any change in her state. She grew weaker and weaker, without suffering much, but without tasting repose or comfort. To judge from her expressions, and the few words she uttered, she was in a very solemn state of mind. She was facing death, as she had so long faced life. I could have wished that she had spoken more, and told us of the glimpses she got of the land that is afar off; but hers was not one of those souls devoid of mystery, which allow their perfume to evaporate. Silence was necessary for her to hold converse with God. There were moments when she even ceased to express tenderness for those around her. With her eyes closed and her hands joined, she was too deeply absorbed for us to venture to interrupt her. No doubt, some great work was being accomplished within her, known only to God. At the approach of death, the creature must be completely prostrated in dust, and in its own insignificance. The promised glory, in proportion as it shines brightly before us, reveals the immense distance which separates the soul from perfect purity. The stains which spoil and dishonour it, the faults which it has so lightly committed, its forgetfulness of God, its selfish and proud bearings, plunge it deeper and deeper in humiliation. It is good for it to be so. The purest souls pass through many delusions during life. But at that awful hour these delusions must vanish, and the sight of the abyss of sin must reveal more clearly to our understandings the immensity of the pardon vouchsafed, and the grandeur of the work of restoration. God has a gra-

cious design in not sparing even His reconciled creature from death. He will humble the soul entirely, to cleanse it for ever from the last remains of sin. Oh ! for submission, and understanding of this heavenly teaching !

One night when I was watching beside Madame de Vaudreuil, absorbed in sad reflection, my eyes watching her slightest movement, I thought I heard the name of Roger escape from her lips. I drew nearer to her, and asked her if she wanted anything.

"Tell Roger to come nearer. Why does he stand at the end of the room ? Call him, for I have not strength."

I turned involuntarily, for she spoke with such great assurance. I saw that her mind was disturbed, and a feeling of uneasiness came over me.

"There is no one here," I replied.

"I was mistaken," she said, "or perhaps he is gone again."

"It is possible," I said, hoping to soothe her.

She was silent for some minutes ; then with a gentle smile—

"How weak my head is," she murmured ; "I took his portrait for himself !"

I saw that the lamp shed its light just on the portrait of the child, and without saying anything, I moved its position, in the hope that the Marchioness would sleep again. She dozed a little, and half-asleep, half-awake, she continued speaking, but so indistinctly that I could not catch her words.

"I pray you," she said at last, "tell me what you know about it."

"About what, madame ?"

"Ah! my child, you know nothing at all about it."

She spoke these words so exactly as she had been accustomed to do, when she used gently to rally me, that tears sprang to my eyes. But this look passed away, and her own grave expression returned.

"Roger or my father could tell me," she said. "They have passed this way. They know the rough and dark road; I cannot think why they do not come and guide me; go, call them, Gabrielle; you do not know what a service you will do me."

She appeared much distressed.

"I cannot explain myself," she added, "yet I have a weight on my chest which I think might be removed. Victor would know what it is."

"Shall I send for him, madame?"

"No; my mind is not clear enough to understand. Ah! it is so humiliating to die?"

I sat down at the foot of the Marchioness' bed; and to still the restlessness that seemed to be upon her, I began to read from the Gospels the account of our Lord's passion. I do not think that she understood all I read, but certain words attracted her attention, and when I stopped reading she was composed.

"Have I given you pain, Gabrielle?" she said.

"Me, madame!"

"I said, Victor would know. That was like a reproach; you quite knew what I wanted—Jesus Christ! Yes! it is of Him you must always speak to those who are going to die. Resurrection! Hope!"

She slept some hours after this, a tranquil sleep; but on her awakening, intense physical suffering assailed her.

I was frightened, and hastened to call for succour. M. de Vaudreuil had been persuaded to take a little repose in the next room. He came immediately, and did not leave her again till her last agony was over. He encouraged her by gentle words, soothed her by his assiduous cares, and helped her to raise her heart and thoughts to heaven. After many hours of extreme pain, Madame de Vaudreuil's sufferings abated. She felt quite calm, her head clearer, and her mind at peace.

"I think you are better now, my beloved?" said her husband.

"I am well."

"I can scarcely bear to see you suffer. I can endure all the rest, even the coming separation; but not your sufferings. My only prayer is, that God will take you gently to Himself."

"You see He grants me an interval of repose; and besides, my beloved, you must not pity me so much, for you know not what ineffable joy rushes into my soul, even while pain racks my body. Do you think I was insensible when your hand was in mine, and your arm supporting my poor head? I was so happy, love, and more happy still with the Divine consolation that was poured into my soul. Victor," she said, after a moment's silence, "let us talk over together the days that are gone."

They talked a long time. M. de Vaudreuil, who has often found so much comfort in talking to me of his wife, and repeating to me her words, has never told me of that conversation. I only know that she completely opened her whole heart to him, as she had never done before, and that they then tasted moments of happiness such as is

vouchsafed only to those who are on the verge of losing all. The doctor interrupted them. He announced that the invalid could not live through the coming night, and recommended the most perfect quiet.

"We shall speak no more together, my beloved," she said. "This has been a very sweet communion—the last we shall ever have. I must now compose myself, and listen to the voice of my Heavenly Master."

Her husband bent over her, and she pressed her lips on his forehead, and looked at him so tenderly, that he could not restrain his tears as he clasped her to his heart.

"I know," she said, "to whom I commit you. He will be with you through life, as He is with me in death."

M. de Vaudreuil asked her if she would take leave of those who were attached to her. She consented; and said to each one a few short, simple words. When it was M. de Beaugency's turn, she looked at him for an instant with unspeakable compassion. He seemed much affected, embarrassed, and unhappy. She said to him, with an angelic smile—

"No, this is not delusion !"

In the evening, we saw death was very near, and we all assembled in the sick-room. She was quite calm; her lips moved in prayer, but she spoke no more.

At two o'clock she had ceased to breathe. A sign from the doctor informed us of it. M. de Vaudreuil was on his knees at the bed-side, his head bent over the lifeless hand of his wife. He did not see the doctor's movement, and no one dared to tell him the truth. Gaston at last went up to him, and stooping down, whispered—

"My dear friend, the sacrifice is accomplished."

M. de Vaudreuil rose; he took the hand of his wife, and looked long at her sweet face. He kissed her cold brow, and turned to leave the room, where he must never more come to look for her. I went one step towards him, and he drew me into his arms, and Gaston also.

As we were going out, his eyes fell on M. de Beaugency, who, alone in a corner of the room, was weeping bitterly. M. de Vaudreuil feared that he felt himself forgotten; and, holding out his hand, said to him—

“And you too, my old friend.”

M. de Beaugency was touched by this delicate feeling. He took the offered hand, but could not reply. Salutary tears were his, from sources too long dried up, but re-opened in the face of Death!

Death!—Life! awful problems which man so often forgets, and often also attempts in vain to solve or guess at. Is life only a succession of unconnected events, and death only the final point of all these accumulated accidents? Many live and die as if such was their belief; and yet, in the depths of every heart there is a confused feeling of the importance of life, and the solemnity of death. I can understand how some people stifle this feeling, and how, between the alternative of trifling away hour after hour of an incomprehensible life, or being terrified in contemplating it as that misery for which there is no remedy, they prefer oblivion to despair.

But Christ came upon earth; and wherefore, if not to save mankind from those two inevitable evils, by restoring them to hope, which enables them to sound, and look all things in the face without fear? Oh, how brightly shines

the love of God, full of light and warmth, in the work of Christ !

The world never needed Christ so much ; never was consolation so vehemently demanded ; and never have men been so utterly destitute of it. They attempt to deny evil—they attempt to deny God. They are seeking, at any price, repose for the intellect, and faith for the heart ; and they find only difficulties and chimeras. It matters not. Error is only a cry of alarm, by which the world proclaims that it is thirsting after truth. Let us listen to this cry—let us reply to this demand.

May God tear away the veils under which Christ is hid, and His greatness obscured ! The different sects which invoke His name, more cruel than the Jews who crucified Him, draw Him down to the narrow measure of the false conceptions of the times which gave them birth. Let us not ask for Christ from these ; but let us seek for Him where He is manifested in His adorable immensity, in all the perfection of His work of love. Let us strive to understand His life and its lessons. Let us understand His death. And since the Father has given the Son to reconcile the world to Himself, let us not live as if reconciliation were impossible, and the world abandoned to its gloomy destiny.

Poor souls ! burning with thirst, and finding nothing to quench your thirst ; poor spirits ! asking for light, and walking in darkness ; poor hearts ! longing to beat, and finding no object for your love—there is One great enough to satisfy all your desires. To the soul thirsting after perfection, He gives restoration ; to the mind disturbed at the sight of evil, He promises its abolition ; to the sick heart, He gives pardon and communion with God.

Thus, notwithstanding the sorrows of life—its bitter griefs and agitations—my conclusion is optimism. I know this is a strange word; but common words do not convey consolation, and I cannot believe in a God who could not entirely console His creature.

“My heart was so joyous,” says the poet, “that I knew it no more for my own.”

FINIS.

